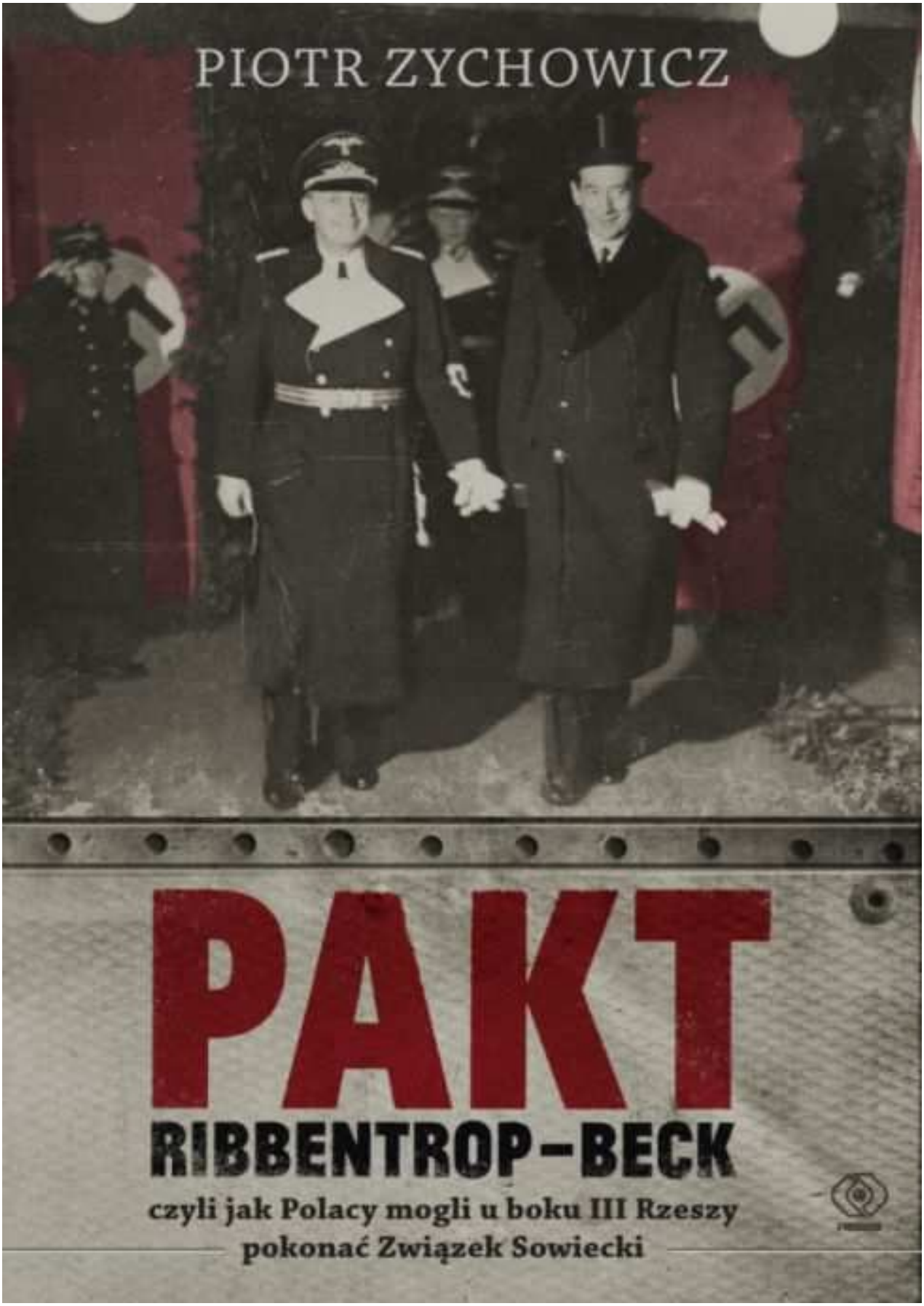

PIOTR ZYCHOWICZ
PAKT
RIBBENTROP–BECK
czyli jak Polacy mogli u boku III Rzeszy
pokonać Związek Sowiecki

PIOTR ZYCHOWICZ

PAKT RIBBENTROP–BECK

czyli jak Polacy mogli u boku III Rzeszy pokonać Związek Sowiecki

DOM WYDAWNICZY REBIS

Poles have all the qualities
except political sense

Winston Churchill

Chapter 1

Poles in the Kremlin '41

The veteran training battleship *Schleswig-Holstein* approached the shore under cover of night. At a given signal, it opened fire with all its guns, including four 280 mm caliber guns. The powerful explosions of quarter-ton shells announced to the world the beginning of the greatest conflict in human history. A conflict that would last five years, claim tens of millions of victims, and devastate three continents.

It was April 9, 1940. On that day, World War II broke out, beginning with the German attack on Denmark and Norway. The surprise was complete. The short campaign—the first Blitzkrieg in European history—ended with a quick victory for the armed forces of the Third Reich. A month later, the Wehrmacht followed up by attacking France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. Europe began to shake to its foundations.

Confident in the Maginot Line, powerful artillery, and their "invincible" infantry, the French suffered a crushing defeat. German armored forces bypassed French fortifications with a daring maneuver and invaded French territory via Belgium. The country's armed forces were crushed and forced to flee. Paris fell on June 14, France surrendered on June 22, and the British Expeditionary Force hastily evacuated through Dunkirk.

Western Europe found itself under German occupation. Its inhabitants experienced firsthand what the Gestapo and SS, the sinister security services of the Third Reich, were like. Roundups, executions, and brutal persecution of Jews began. Adolf Hitler, the leader of the radical National Socialist movement who had seized power in Berlin just seven years earlier, was triumphant. He believed himself to be the new Alexander the Great.

Meanwhile, in Poland, located in eastern Europe, calm prevailed. Of course, this calm was relative to what was happening in the west of the continent. While the countries in that part of Europe were being reduced to rubble one by one under the powerful blows of the Wehrmacht's war machine, Poland was swept by a wave of anti-government unrest. It was organized by a rare alliance of pro-Soviet communists and anti-German nationalists, who were normally at odds with each other.

Demonstrations broke out on the streets of Warsaw, Vilnius, Krakow, Lviv, Poznań, Stanisławów, and a number of other cities in the Republic of Poland, turning into street fights and riots, which were severely suppressed by the mounted police. Rubber truncheons were used, and the crowds were beaten. The outrage of a large part of the Polish population was directed against the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Józef Beck. This not particularly popular politician suddenly became public enemy number one.

He was accused of "dishonoring the Polish nation" and pursuing a "cowardly policy of concessions." He was called "Hitler's lackey" and "a German agent." A year earlier, Józef Beck had bowed to pressure from Germany, made concessions to his western neighbor, and agreed to Poland's accession to the Anti-Comintern Pact. It was this decision that gave Hitler a free hand and paved the way for his attack on the West.

What Beck did has disgraced us for centuries to come. A nation of valiant knights and patriotic youth has become a nation of cowards. We have been reduced to the level of the Czechs. How could anyone be frightened by German bluffs and cardboard tanks? How could anyone betray

France, our best ally, whom we could always count on?” wrote Stanisław Stroński in the Warsaw National Daily in April 1940. The cafés in Warsaw, Poznań, and Lviv, which were regular meeting places for National Democrats, were buzzing with excitement.

During talks with Hitler at his Alpine villa, Berghof, Józef Beck agreed to the proposals put forward to Warsaw. These included the annexation of the Free City of Gdańsk to the Reich and the construction of an extraterritorial motorway connecting Prussia with the rest of Germany through Polish Pomerania. It was less than forty kilometers long and was built on high pillars in the form of a viaduct. In return, Germany, as promised, guaranteed Poland its western border and extended the 1934 non-aggression pact to twenty-five years. The agreement signed in Warsaw went down in history as the Ribbentrop-Beck Pact, as its signatory on the German side was Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop.

This stirred up Polish public opinion, but the unrest did not last long. As successive waves of powerful armed forces from the Third Reich swept through Western Europe, bringing down one country after another like a house of cards, including France, considered the "leading continental power," criticism of Beck's decision subsided considerably. It became clear that Poland had narrowly escaped the same fate.

Leaks that began to filter into the European press from circles close to German foreign policy makers revealed something even more sinister. In 1939, the leaders of the Third Reich began to develop a "plan B." Considering the possibility that Poland would reject the proposal, they contemplated—yes, it sounds like political fiction—forming an alliance with... the communist Soviet Union!

There was no time for historical and political analyses. The country was secretly put on a war footing. Polish factories were rolling out more and more planes and tanks. Ammunition was being produced and uniforms were being sewn. Tens of thousands of reservists were receiving their mobilization cards in the mail. The country was preparing for war. The Ribbentrop–Beck Pact contained secret protocols concerning one of Poland's neighbors...

June 22, 1941

That day was a turning point in the history of World War II and the entire world. On that day, Germany and Poland—along with several minor allies—went to war with the Soviet Union. Operation Barbarossa, known in Polish as Plan
"Hetman." Thus, after more than a year, the war reached Eastern Europe, which had been peaceful until then. International commentators could not help but draw parallels. Once again, as in 1812 alongside Napoleon, the Poles marched on Moscow. This time, they marched alongside Hitler.

The attack was seen as revenge for 1920, when the Bolsheviks invaded and ravaged the territory of the Republic of Poland. The Red Army committed many crimes in Poland at that time, but failed to achieve its goal of conquering and Sovietizing the country. The Poles, too, although victorious on the battlefield, failed to achieve their goal. They did not manage to defeat Bolshevism and create the powerful Eastern European federation stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea, which Marshal Józef Piłsudski had dreamed of.

The war of 1920 was therefore considered undecided in Europe, and international affairs experts expected a rematch. It began on June 22, 1941. The notes of war were handed to the head of Soviet diplomacy, Vyacheslav Molotov, by the German ambassador to Moscow, Friedrich-Werner von der Schulenburg, and the Polish ambassador, Wacław Grzybowski.

"In view of the bankruptcy of the Soviet state, Poland sees no other option than to come to the aid of the representatives of the nations of the Republic: Poles, Ukrainians, and Belarusians who inhabit the former Soviet territory," read the note delivered by the Polish diplomat. Outraged, Molotov refused to accept the document. However, he was unable to reach Joseph Stalin, who was surprised and terrified by the attack.

diplomat. Molotov was outraged and refused to accept the document. However, he was unable to reach Joseph Stalin, who, surprised and terrified by the attack, had gone into hiding.

Meanwhile, along the entire length of the Polish-Soviet border, Junkers and Los bombers bombarded Red Army positions. Almost the entire enemy air force was destroyed on the runways. The same happened to the armored weapons grouped in large numbers right at the border. Polish and German troops that entered the territory of the Red Empire encountered extremely weak enemy resistance.

The Red Army surrendered entire divisions, from cooks and orderlies to generals and staff officers. The population, oppressed by the communists, welcomed the soldiers entering the city as liberators. Flowers were thrown at the columns of tanks, and white and red flags, hastily sewn from pieces of fabric, appeared in windows. They were hung by Soviet Poles decimated in 1937 during the so-called Polish operation of the NKVD, Ukrainians who less than a decade earlier had fallen victim to genocide during the artificially induced Great Famine, but also Belarusians, Jews, and Russians.

In almost every major town occupied by coalition forces, prisons filled with piles of corpses were found. Surprised by the attack, NKVD officers did not have time to evacuate political prisoners and decided to carry out their hasty and extremely brutal extermination. The Red torturers threw grenades into the cells or shot the crowded prisoners with machine guns. Others were massacred with bayonets and axes in the prison courtyards. Among those murdered were many Poles with Soviet citizenship.

Polish armored divisions, which had expanded significantly over the previous two years (1939–1941), spread terror among the enemy ranks and dug deep into their territory. Their commander, General Stanisław Maczek, began a "race to Moscow" with his German counterpart, General Heinz Guderian. In the conditions of a blitzkrieg across the vast expanses of the East, the Polish cavalry also proved its worth.

Meanwhile, on June 26, 1941, the Polish government issued a proclamation to the Ukrainian people, signed by Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz. It began with the words: "Brothers, we come to you not as enemies, but as friends. Not as oppressors, but as liberators. We are following in the footsteps of Józef Piłsudski and Semen Petliura, two great leaders who understood best that the fates of our nations are intertwined like the branches of entwined trees..."

Śmigły-Rydz went on to call on the inhabitants of Ukraine to fight against "the common mortal enemy of both nations and of all humanity – Bolshevism." He promised to abolish the kolkhozes, introduce religious freedom, and outlaw the Communist Party. The proclamation also included an announcement of the creation of a "great, independent Ukraine bound by an eternal brotherly alliance with the Republic of Poland."

September 17, 1941

The response to this proclamation was enormous, with Polish troops being greeted enthusiastically by the local population throughout Ukraine. After capturing Kamianets-Podilskyi, Zhytomyr, Vinnytsia, Korosten, Berdychiv, and Koziatyn in early July, a great battle for Kyiv began. It was the first serious clash on the southern section of the front, where the Polish Army and the Wehrmacht clashed with the Red Army in this campaign.

The battle was victorious. A million Soviet soldiers and huge amounts of equipment were surrounded by Polish and German forces. Almost the entire Southwestern Front of the Red Army was destroyed. Kiev fell on September 19. An unprecedented number of prisoners of war were taken

. As historians later calculated, in the first months of the war, a total of over four million enemy soldiers surrendered to the Poles and Germans.

During the fierce fighting for the Ukrainian capital, the Polish infantry distinguished itself, whose determination and combativeness earned the admiration of their German comrades-in-arms. The Poles, who repeatedly charged with bayonets and literally wiped out Soviet units, were showered with Virtuti Militari and Iron Crosses. "This is the greatest victory in the history of warfare. I pay tribute to the thousands of Polish and German soldiers who made this great day possible. We will win because our cause is just. Sieg Heil!" Adolf Hitler said enthusiastically in a radio address.

At the same time, Joseph Stalin became active, calling on the nations of the Soviet Union to fight to the death against the "fascist invader." "The struggle we are waging is not only for the future of our homeland, but also for the future of humanity. The future of socialism and the preservation of its achievements depend on you, brothers and sisters. We have been treacherously attacked by the brown German hydra and its Polish minions. They will not leave Russia alive!" Stalin appealed and threatened.

After capturing Kiev, the Poles began an offensive to the northeast, along the Kiev–Chernihiv–Bryansk–Kaluga line. The world, which watched this greatest Blitzkrieg in history with bated breath, seemed to believe that the Polish-German alliance was at the height of its success, cemented by shared bloodshed and joint victories. In reality, however, the actions of the German ally began to cause serious concern in Warsaw.

Disturbing news began to reach Polish headquarters from sections of the front where the Germans were fighting. While Polish troops were fighting only the Red Army and were indeed liberating towns and villages from Soviet rule, the Germans were committing terrible crimes in the territories they had captured. The Wehrmacht was followed by special SS units, the Einsatzgruppen, which carried out mass executions of Jews.

This led to a series of conflicts between Polish and German soldiers. There were fights and even spontaneous shootings between allies. Polish soldiers of Jewish origin reacted particularly nervously to German acts of violence. In the Polish army, numbering about one and a half million soldiers fighting in the east, almost ten percent of conscripts were of the Jewish faith.

Meanwhile, Jewish civilians fled en masse from German-occupied territories to Soviet territories liberated by the Poles. Interventions by the Polish government in Berlin were of little avail, and the Germans continued their bloody practices. This led to increased tension between the allies. The first cracks appeared in the Polish-German partnership. The Poles began to realize that in order to defeat the devil, they had allied themselves with Satan.

The two armies also treated prisoners of war, whose numbers were growing, in completely different ways. The Poles treated theirs humanely. They sent the rank and file home and locked the officers up in decent prisoner-of-war camps that met the conditions set out in international conventions. Those who expressed a desire to do so were incorporated into auxiliary units fighting Bolshevism. Initially, the Poles planned to organize only a Ukrainian army, but soon Russian, Belarusian, and even Turkmen units began to form alongside the Polish Army.

The Germans treated prisoners worse than animals. They placed them in fields surrounded by barbed wire fences, exposed to the elements. They starved them, abused them, and killed them. Epidemics and cannibalism spread, and prisoners died like flies. Once again, Polish interventions were of little use. The Germans justified this practice by saying that the Soviets had not signed the Geneva Conventions. They also pointed to the atrocities of the Soviet regime.

The traces of NKVD crimes encountered by Polish and German soldiers were truly bloodcurdling. A terrible fate also befell the few coalition soldiers who were taken

captured by the Red Army. However, the Poles' arguments that the criminal regime should be separated from ordinary Soviet citizens oppressed by the communists did not convince the Germans, who thought in racial terms.

October 24, 1941

Meanwhile, in September 1941, the decisive battle for Moscow began. The Soviets threw everything they had against the Axis powers. They brought elite Siberian divisions from the Far East. Tanks that had just rolled off the production line entered the battlefield. Stalin began to strike an increasingly hysterical tone: "The fate of our socialist homeland hangs in the balance. The country of the Soviets is in mortal danger! Everything to the rescue of Moscow! Everything against the Polish-German fascists!" he urged on the radio.

"Soldiers!" Marshal Śmigły-Rydz addressed the troops on the eastern front. "A historic moment has arrived. You are following in the footsteps of the great hetman Żółkiewski, who more than three centuries ago defeated the Muscovite army and planted the Polish flag on the towers of the Kremlin. Just as he did then, you are now making history. The entire Republic looks upon you with admiration and hope. Death to the Bolshevik plague! Long live Great Poland."

To the amazement of the world – which had already become convinced that nothing could stop the rampaging Wehrmacht and Polish Army – the Axis offensive began to lose momentum. More and more German and Polish units were bogged down in heavy fighting with the Red Army. Soviet soldiers began to put up fierce resistance and, in some sections, especially those where the Germans themselves were attacking, they fought exceptionally well.

This was not due to some great love they suddenly felt for Bolshevik rule. As historians later determined, there were two reasons for this unexpected resistance. First, information began to reach the Red Army soldiers about the terrible treatment of prisoners of war by the Germans. They understood that surrender could have terrible consequences for them. Secondly, they had no choice and simply had to fight. Behind them were sinister NKVD blocking detachments armed with machine guns. Not a step back, or it would be a bullet in the head!

And so it came to the greatest battle in the history of the world. On one side were the Germans, Poles, Hungarians, Romanians, and other allies; on the other, the Soviets. In total, several million soldiers, huge numbers of tanks, cannons, and aircraft. Millions of shells were fired, and tens of thousands of people died on both sides. The Axis forces were commanded by Field Marshal Fedor von Bock and General Tadeusz Kutrzeba. On the other side stood General Georgy Zhukov.

When it seemed that the battle would remain undecided and the Germans and Poles would have to retreat from the gates of Moscow and withdraw to their winter quarters, General Maczek launched a daring attack on Zhukov's southern flank. An iron wedge of 7TP and 14TP tanks drove between the Soviet armies. From the air, squadrons *of Łoś* bombers reduced the Red Army's fortifications to rubble. At the same time, General Władysław Anders, a former officer of the Tsarist army, led a huge cavalry force in a fantastic night raid around the Soviet positions and crashed with force into the rear of the surprised Bolsheviks.

The Red Army could not hold out, and the front was broken. Polish troops stormed the boulevards of the Soviet capital. It was October 24, the anniversary of the Bolshevik coup of 1917. A group of cavalrymen, commemorating a similar feat performed by their colleagues twenty years earlier in Kiev, bought tickets and rode the Moscow metro in uniform, with weapons in hand. Girls threw themselves at them.

At the same time, a counterrevolution broke out in the streets of the city. The Russians began their long-awaited revenge on the communists. They were now taking revenge for two gruesome decades during which they had been terrorized, starved, humiliated, and murdered by the Bolsheviks. Party headquarters were smashed, red banners and portraits of Soviet leaders were torn down, and burned.

committees. Thousands of party documents and discarded red ID cards littered the streets. The first to fall was Lubyanka, the headquarters of the hated security service. The crowd freed the prisoners held there, and the NKVD officers who failed to escape were literally torn to pieces.

Another group of Polish lancers, one of the first to reach the streets of Moscow, was greeted with gunfire by an elite NKVD unit defending the Yaroslavsky Railway Station. However, the Soviets were pelted with grenades, then shot and cut down with sabers by the Poles. The lancers rushed onto the platform, where a dozen or so people – some in security service uniforms, others in white coats – were hurriedly packing a wooden crate onto a waiting train.

When they saw the Poles, they dropped the coffin on the ground and scattered in all directions. The astonished lancers saw Lenin's mummy among the broken boards. It turned out that the Bolsheviks had tried to evacuate the body of the leader of the revolution from Moscow, but, surprised by the speed of the Polish attack, they did not manage to load it onto the train. One of the lancers, Stefan Kozłowski, a cadet of the 21st Regiment of Vistula Lancers, cut off the head of the stuffed effigy with a powerful blow and impaled it on his saber, then walked out of the station building with his trophy. The crowds of Moscow residents gathered there howled with joy. The nightmare of communism, which had lasted for nearly a quarter of a century, was over!

When the capital of the red empire fell into the hands of the coalition, the regime immediately collapsed. Scenes similar to those in Moscow played out in other cities and in units of the Red Army. Across the entire front, soldiers slaughtered the hated political commissars and dispersed to their homes. Above the Kremlin, for the first time since 1612, the Polish flag fluttered.

Seeing that the Soviet regime was falling apart, Japan entered the war, attacking the last units of the Red Army in the Far East, which had maintained some semblance of discipline. Stalin, hidden in a bunker in Kuibyshev, where he had evacuated with his government, shot himself in the head as Polish and German soldiers approached his hideout. The first person to reach the dictator's body was a Pole: Józef Zychowicz from the 2nd Kaniów Sapper Regiment.

He went down in history for killing Lavrentiy Beria, the head of the sinister NKVD, who had the blood of millions of people on his hands and remained loyal to the dictator until the very end. When the sapper broke into the bunker, Beria jumped out from behind the chair on which Stalin's body was slumped (reportedly, the gun in his hand was still smoking). The head of the NKVD lunged at the Pole, but was stopped by a blow to the head with a rifle butt, which shattered his frontal bone and crushed his brain. The Georgian Chekist died on the spot.

A joint victory parade was soon held on Red Square, attended by Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz and Adolf Hitler. Surrounded by generals from both countries, they stood on the podium from which, not long before, members of the Communist Politburo had watched the parade. The Führer was triumphant and, with tears of excitement in his eyes, he embraced the Polish marshal and his accompanying foreign minister, Józef Beck.

Side by side, with the screech of tracks on the cobblestones of Red Square, long columns of tanks rolled by. 14TPs alongside Panzerkampfwagen IIIs. Polish and German infantry marched shoulder to shoulder. However, observers unanimously agreed that the Polish cavalry squadrons equipped with long lances presented themselves best. The uhlans saluted their victorious marshal, and the clatter of their horses' hooves continued to echo in the streets of Moscow for a long time...

Winners in the camp of the losers

In St. Petersburg, a large trial of captured Bolshevik regime dignitaries was quickly organized and covered by the press around the world. Vyacheslav Molotov, Kliment Voroshilov, Anastas Mikoyan, Mikhail Kalinin, Lazar Kaganovich and others communist

criminals were found guilty of genocide and war crimes and subsequently hanged. The trial was marred by scandal, as German prosecutors attempted to accuse the communists of crimes committed by individuals of the Third Reich.

As a result of the intervention of Germany's allies – Poland, Hungary, and Italy – these points were not included in the indictment. However, the "zoological anti-fascists" pointed out the hypocrisy of the organizers of the Petersburg trials. The communists were accused by the National Socialists, who themselves had terrible crimes on their conscience. "Well, history is written by the victors," commented the opposition press sarcastically. However, given the enormity of the Soviet crimes that had been revealed, few people took these voices seriously.

Polish, German, and Japanese liberators freed millions of Zeks, prisoners of the terrible Soviet concentration camps. It turned out that the entire territory of the communist colossus was covered with a dense archipelago of labor camps, where the Bolsheviks exterminated their real and imagined political opponents, forcing them to perform murderous labor.

Newspapers around the world published poignant photographs of terribly emaciated prisoners dressed in rags, who threw themselves into the arms of bewildered German and Polish soldiers with tears in their eyes. Exhumations were carried out near each labor camp, during which millions of human skeletons were recovered. The gruesome Soviet crimes committed in the camps in Siberia became a grim symbol of evil for the next century. A symbol of what a person blinded by a sick ideology can do to another human being.

However, the spectacular victory of Germany and Poland on the Eastern Front did not end World War II. On the contrary, military operations in other theaters of war were escalating. Although Japan postponed its plans to attack American bases in the Pacific after attacking the collapsing Soviet Union, the United States entered the war anyway. This decision was influenced not so much by pressure from the British, who invoked Anglo-Saxon solidarity, as by Washington's concern about the possibility of global hegemony by the Third Reich. After conquering the Soviet Union, Germany pressed on, breaking through the Caucasus and entering the Middle East. A large anti-British and pro-German Arab uprising immediately broke out in the region. Turkey and Iran submitted to Germany. However, the main target of the Asian campaign was India – the jewel in the British crown.

While increasingly fierce fighting between the Germans and the Anglo-Saxons was raging in the Atlantic Ocean, the Middle East, Asia, and the deserts of North Africa, in Eastern Europe the victors were dividing up the territories that had once belonged to the Soviet Union. As early as 1939, during talks in Warsaw between Reich Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and Józef Beck, it was agreed that the Soviet Union would be divided according to historical principles.

Poland invoked the traditions of the pre-partition Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and, in exchange for participating in the anti-communist crusade, demanded that Germany cede the Soviet republics of Belarus and Ukraine to it. The Poles argued that since the Second Polish Republic already included territories inhabited by Belarusians and Ukrainians, it was logical to unite these countries under Warsaw's rule.

The Germans agreed to this on condition that their economic interests were guaranteed. The main point was that the Poles would supply them with raw materials from Ukraine for as long as the war in the West continued. The Third Reich, in turn, was to take over the Baltic states, which Germany had occupied without firing a shot, and Russia proper. These were territories, especially Estonia, Latvia, and northern Russia, already largely saturated with the German element that had been flowing there for centuries.

This division line was laid down as early as 1939 in the secret protocols to the Ribbentrop–Beck Pact, and the concept was implemented, after minor border adjustments, following the dismantling of the Soviet Union by the Allies. The Soviet Far East went to Japan, while Romania received a smaller part of the fallen empire.

However, the Republic and the Reich administered the conquered territories in diametrically different ways. The Poles introduced a liberal regime, granting the Belarusians and Ukrainians broad autonomy. They relied on them to create local administrations and organized police and auxiliary military units composed of representatives of these nations. They dissolved the kolkhozes, which were hated by the population, and restored religious freedom, private property, and a market economy.

Thanks to all this, they gained enormous support from the population, which until recently had been living in extreme poverty and constant fear of the NKVD. Ultimately, the Polish government – made up mostly of students of Józef Piłsudski, who had been dead for six years – planned to realize the Marshal's dream and create a powerful Polish-Belarusian-Ukrainian federation under Polish leadership.

The Germans pursued a completely different policy in the occupied territories of Russia (Generalgouvernement für die besetzten russischen Gebiete). They considered Russians and representatives of other nations of the former Soviet Union to be Untermenschen. Repression and terror intensified. As (national) socialists, the Germans did not dissolve the kolkhozes and maintained a centrally planned economy. The Jewish population was subjected to particularly brutal repression. The terror of the NKVD was replaced by the terror of the Gestapo.

Polish suggestions that Germany should appeal to Russian anti-Soviet patriotism and create under its auspices a "white" state Russia, were ignored.
"Self-government is the first step towards independence. What has been gained by force cannot be maintained democratically. What is the point of conquering a free country only to give it back its freedom? Those who shed blood have the right to rule over what they have gained," said Adolf Hitler during one of his conversations with Poles.

Intoxicated by his enormous victory, the Führer began to implement a mad plan to colonize Russia, which caused terror in Warsaw and among more reasonable Germans. This area was to become a source of raw materials for the Reich, where German farmers would have the status of lords and Russian peasants would be slaves. All this, of course, led to the emergence of a powerful Russian resistance movement and an intensification of partisan activities, which tied up more and more German forces.

Grim news was coming from the occupied territories about how the Germans were treating the Jews. There was talk of camps and the mass extermination of this nation. The Germans even approached Poland with a suggestion to hand over Soviet Jews from the territories occupied by the Polish Army, but this was met with a decisive and very harsh response from Warsaw. Hitler, not wanting to strain relations with his most important ally, backed down. But it was an ominous sign.

Meanwhile, in the West, the Allied forces were gaining an increasing advantage over the Germans. The Reich was losing on the seas, in the Middle East, in Asia, and in North Africa. Fighting on so many fronts required ever greater resources and tied up more and more Wehrmacht divisions. Finally, in the summer of 1944, the British and Americans carried out a spectacular landing in France. In response, the Germans transferred all their available divisions from the East to the West. The struggle that would decide the outcome of World War II had begun. The Germans put up fierce resistance, but in the long run, they had no chance against the power of the United States, which was already on its way to becoming a global superpower. The American Manhattan Project, i.e., work on the construction of an atomic bomb, was entering its final phase.

Adolf Hitler visited Warsaw several times during those decisive weeks. Each time he attempted to persuade Poland to actively join the war against the Western Allies, he received a polite but firm refusal. Ailing and increasingly detached from reality, the Führer raged with fury. In the presence of his closest associates, he

He stamped his feet, rolled around on the ground, bit the carpets, and tore off his uniform. He even planned to punish "ungrateful Poland" with military force, but his generals strongly advised him against opening a second front at such a difficult time.

At the same time, in neutral Lisbon secret negotiations were taking place between Warsaw, London, and Washington. The Allies promised that if Poland resisted Hitler's pressure and, instead of moving its troops to the West, changed alliances and attacked Germany, they would recognize all of its territorial gains in the East after the war. The offer was accepted, and Poland began to prepare for another war.

Meanwhile, in the crumbling Reich, only the most fanatical National Socialists retained their faith in victory, listening to Hitler's absurd stories about a mysterious Wunderwaffe that was supposed to turn the tide of war at the last minute. A group of conservative officers tried to save the situation. However, they failed to blow up Hitler and paid for their attempted coup with their lives. Meanwhile, the Allied forces crossed the pre-war border of Germany. The Americans threatened that if the Reich did not surrender immediately, they would drop an atomic bomb on it.

It was then that Eastern Europe witnessed – as the Völkischer Beobachter wrote indignantly – “a shameful betrayal unparalleled in world history.” At a time when the Third Reich was preparing for a decisive battle, the Poles entered the fray. It began spectacularly – an extraterritorial motorway through Polish Pomerania, built only six years earlier, was blown up.

Polish Army units crossed the entire length of the border with East Prussia and advanced into Silesia and Western Pomerania. Taken by surprise by their ally's betrayal, the Germans offered almost no resistance. Polish troops occupied Königsberg, Olsztyn, and Gdańsk. At the same time, the Poles cut all communication lines connecting the Reich with the occupied territories in the East. The remaining German divisions there were surrounded and defeated in a swift campaign by the Poles and their eastern allies.

Upon hearing the news of what was happening in the East, the morale of the troops fighting against the Allies on the Western Front plummeted. The front collapsed and, after heavy, fierce fighting in August 1945, Anglo-American troops stormed the German capital. Adolf Hitler, locked in a bunker near the Reich Chancellery, followed in the footsteps of Joseph Stalin and committed suicide. Germany soon surrendered and the war in Western Europe came to an end.

However, fighting continued in the East, where the final act of the short Polish-German campaign was taking place. Polish armored troops launched a daring raid into the Baltic states occupied by the Reich, defeating the modest occupation forces stationed there. The inhabitants of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, who had been living under heavy German rule for nearly five years, welcomed the Poles as liberators. Prussia was formally incorporated into the Republic of Poland, and the Baltic states, after Poland restored their sovereignty, voluntarily joined the federation created by Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine. Marshal Piłsudski's dream had come true. Poland had become powerful. At the peace conference held in the Polish seaside resort of Jurata, Winston Churchill, Harry Truman, and Edward Śmigły-Rydz called the shots. The photo of these three gentlemen sitting side by side in wicker armchairs has gone down in history.

"Clio has been kind to us again," wrote Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz, one of the leading political journalists of those years. "After World War I, we regained our independence only because both of the partitioning powers, Germany and Russia, lay in ruins. Now this scenario has repeated itself. The Third Reich and the Soviet Union have ceased to exist. It is a paradox of history. Although formally we are in the camp of the defeated countries, we have won this war. It really could have been the other way around.”

Chapter 2

Saving millions

The alternative scenario presented in the previous chapter could have come true if one man had changed one decision. We are talking about Józef Beck, a certified colonel of horse artillery and the last foreign minister of the Second Polish Republic. The most important figure in the entire, history of Poland. And it cannot be ruled out that he was one of the most important figures in the history of Europe.

In writing this book, I wanted to prove that Beck made a fatal, even nightmarish mistake in 1939. A mistake that had a huge impact on the fate of Poland and caused immeasurable human suffering, the grim consequences of which we still feel today. This mistake was to bind the Republic of Poland in an alliance with the Western powers and at the same time reject the offer of an alliance made by Germany.

An alliance with the Third Reich would have been an unpleasant pact, concluded at the cost of concessions that greatly damaged Poland's prestige and bound it to a nasty totalitarian regime. When signing the pact with Joachim von Ribbentrop, Beck should have signed with one hand and held his nose with the other.

However, in international politics, it sometimes happens—something that Poles have been unable to understand to this day—that in order to save the state and its citizens, leaders guided by reasons of state must sometimes agree to painful compromises. They must make morally questionable decisions and form tactical alliances with partners who arouse their aversion and disgust. This is called Realpolitik.

Today, more than seventy years after that fateful year of 1939, the time has come to analyze, calmly and without emotion, the events that led to the greatest catastrophe to befall Poland – World War II. And to ask again the questions that every Pole must ask themselves. Did this war really have to start with us? Did we have to lose several million citizens in it? Were we doomed to lose half of our territory, including our beloved Vilnius and Lviv? Were we doomed to lose our independence for six long decades? In other words, did we really have to suffer such a severe defeat?

All these misfortunes that befell the Republic and its nations were the consequence of a single political agreement. Signed in the Kremlin on the night of August 23-24, 1939, it was a non-aggression pact between the Third Reich and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This agreement, accompanied by a secret protocol deciding on the fourth partition of Poland, went down in history as the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact, named after its signatories.

Today, in light of source materials revealed over the past few decades, there is no longer any doubt that Poland could have prevented the signing of this pact. Adolf Hitler decided to make an agreement with Joseph Stalin only after Józef Beck rejected his offer of an alliance. This may sound shocking to Poles, but it was the last head of diplomacy of the Second Polish Republic who pushed Hitler into Stalin's arms, which ended so disastrously for us.

Poles are very attached to matters of prestige, and even oversensitive about them. The concept of national pride is probably most widespread in Poland. Unfortunately, however, there are situations when one has to swallow a bitter pill and give in. This was the case in 1939. Only by making concessions to its stronger western neighbor could Poland

prevent the most unfavorable and terrifying scenario for it at the time – an agreement between Moscow and Berlin.

Such a decision would have completely changed the balance of power in Europe and caused history to unfold in a completely different way. Above all, the history of Poland. The first and most important benefit that the Republic would derive from an alliance with the Third Reich would be to spare its citizens suffering, or, in dispassionate professional language, to save the biological substance of the nation. Of all the misfortunes that befell us between 1939 and 1945, the hecatomb of representatives of the nations of the Republic of Poland seems to be the greatest misfortune.

History has never been kind to us. Poles have experienced the bitter taste of defeat many times throughout their history. Our lands were taken away from us, we lost battles and wars. We lost our sovereignty and independence for decades. However, never in our entire history have Polish citizens been subjected to such terrible persecution. Never before have they been victims of such horrific genocide as during World War II. Never before have they been shot in the back of the head over death pits, suffocated in gas chambers, or exterminated in the snows of Kolyma.

In percentage terms, no other country suffered such high human losses as Poland. There is no family in Poland that did not lose someone close to them during the last war as a result of the genocidal actions of both occupiers – the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. My family is no exception. Many factors contributed to this, but two of them seem to be dominant.

Firstly, the territory of the Republic of Poland was under German occupation for the longest period of time (not counting the relatively mild German military presence in Bohemia and Moravia), which was a result of Poland being the first to join the fight and the first to offer armed resistance to Adolf Hitler.

Secondly, unlike most other countries, we did not fight against one of the genocidal and totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, but against both at the same time. This exposed us to double repression. Poles fell victim to both the NKVD and the Gestapo. Both the Red Army and the SS.

Accepting the German offer in 1939 would have eliminated both of these factors. We would have entered the war at a later stage, without exposing our citizens to immediate occupation, and we would have fought only one of our historical enemies at a time. As a result, the scale of suffering endured by Polish citizens during World War II would have been significantly reduced.

Let us pause here for a moment to briefly explain what plans Adolf Hitler had for Poland until mid-1939 and what Berlin's offer to Warsaw consisted of. Poland, by joining the Anti-Comintern Pact, was to play a key role in the war plans of the leader of the Third Reich.

Hitler initially intended to attack France and Great Britain. During this campaign, the Republic of Poland was to secure the rear of the Wehrmacht against a possible attack by the Soviet Union. The Germans planned to turn eastward after capturing Paris. At that point, Poland's role was to be offensive. Alongside Germany, we were to take part in an expedition against the Soviet Union, and then, together with them, reorganize the space left behind by Stalin's empire.

It is therefore easy to calculate that if history had unfolded in this way, Poland would not have entered World War II on September 1, 1939, but only after the fall of France, when the campaign against the Soviets began. It can be assumed with a high degree of probability that Operation Barbarossa would have been carried out at around the same time as it actually began, i.e. in the spring of 1941.

Major campaigns – and both the war with France and the war with the Soviets were undoubtedly major campaigns – begin in the spring in order to have as much time as possible before the weather deteriorates in the fall. So if Poland had joined the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1939, Hitler would not have been able to attack France until the spring of the following year, i.e. 1940.

He would have to defeat Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France, and then push Great Britain back to its islands. Then it would be necessary to hold a victory parade on the Champs-Élysées, take a photo under the Eiffel Tower, give the weary army some rest, rearm and prepare. All this would take a long time, and by 1940 an attack on the Soviets would be out of the question. The earliest possible date would be the spring of 1941.

This means that between 1939 and 1941, the citizens of the Republic of Poland would have remained completely unscathed. For almost two years, i.e. one third of the entire war, normal, undisturbed, peaceful life would have continued in our country. Can you imagine that? Until the spring of 1941, Poles would only read about the war in newspapers and hear about it on the radio. No one in Poland would have been murdered, shot, bombed, transported in cattle cars to the Arctic Circle, or locked up in ghettos. At most, there would have been demonstrations and riots organized by the Polish opposition and communist agent networks. However, the police would have been able to deal with them.

Poland and the whole of Central and Eastern Europe, while the war would devastate other Western countries, would be a bastion of peace. This alone would be enough to conclude this book and the entire argument. This one, sole benefit – shortening the suffering of war for Poland and Poles from six to four years – is enough to prove the thesis that Józef Beck made a fatal mistake by rejecting the German offer.

The 1939 campaign would not have taken place. There would have been no September bombing of Polish cities, including the destruction of Warsaw. Luftwaffe planes would not have mowed down crowds of panicked refugees on congested roads with machine gun fire. American photographer Julien Bryan would never have taken the shocking photo of 12-year-old Kazimiera Mika wringing her hands over the body of her sister, killed by a German pilot. There would also have been no executions or other war crimes in September.

There would have been no German occupation between 1939 and 1941, and therefore no Intelligenzaktion or Aktion AB. There would have been no mass executions in Palmiry, no one would have been expelled from Pomerania and Poznań, and professors at Jagiellonian University would have worked peacefully for two more academic years instead of rotting in unheated barracks in Sachsenhausen. There would have been no Warthegau and no General Government. Hans Frank would have sat quietly in Berlin instead of indulging his sadistic tendencies in Krakow.

17 September 1939 in the eastern territories of the Republic of Poland would have been just another day, another page in the calendar. In Vilnius, perhaps the biggest sensation that day would have been the arrival of a popular cabaret troupe from Warsaw, and in Lviv, an electrifying rumor about a romance among the upper classes that took place in the rooms of the luxurious George Hotel.

There would have been no murders and massacres committed by the NKVD and the Red Army after they entered the territory of the Second Polish Republic. Soviet tanks would not have crushed the bodies of scouts who died in the heroic defense of Grodno with their tracks. Hundreds of thousands of Poles would not have been sent to the steppes of Kazakhstan and to the labor camps and mines of Siberia. There would have been no Soviet sham elections and referendums. There would be no Western Belarus or Western Ukraine. Finally, the most terrible crime committed against the Polish nation would not have taken place – there would be no Katyn.

In April 1940, instead of kneeling over a mass grave with their hands tied behind their backs, waiting for a bullet, Polish officers would have been taking part in maneuvers and preparing for a war with Bolshevism, which was not to take place for another year.

Polish children would go to school as usual, and adults would go to work. Factories would operate, newspapers would be published, and actors would perform in theaters. Polish railways and airlines would function normally. Polish citizens would be able to correspond and travel abroad. Life would go on peacefully. Several hundred terrible days of occupation would simply be erased from the war calendar thanks to one signature by Józef Beck.

And we are only talking about the consequences for Poland. If Joachim von Ribbentrop, instead of flying to Moscow, had flown to Warsaw to sign the pact, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia would also have retained their independence for at least a year and a half to two years. Romania and Finland would have maintained their territorial integrity. The Soviets would not have invaded the Baltic states, seized Romanian Bessarabia, or started the Winter War. All these acts of aggression, during which human rights were violated on a massive scale, were a consequence of the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact.

That seems like quite a lot in exchange for tarnishing the honor that Foreign Minister Józef Beck, Commander-in-Chief Edward Śmigły-Rydz, and President Ignacy Mościcki wanted to defend "at all costs," dragging us into war with the Soviet Union and the Third Reich.

But that's not all. The civilian population of Poland would have been safe not only in 1939–1941, but also later. The war against the Soviet Union, fought jointly with Germany, would have been completely different from the one we fought in 1939 against Germany and the Soviet Union at the same time. The difference would not only be that we would be fighting only one enemy, but above all that we would be the attacking party in this conflict, rather than defending ourselves against aggression.

Consequently, military operations would take place not on our own territory, but on enemy territory. Poland would be a peaceful rear base for a front line that was moving further and further away from its borders.

I don't think anyone needs to be told what the difference is. It is easy to calculate what war on its own territory means for a country – its cities, infrastructure, and inhabitants.

If we had fought the Bolsheviks across the vast expanses of the Soviet Union, we would obviously have suffered losses, but only our soldiers would have died in those battles, not women, old people, and children. Professor Jerzy Łojek, author of the excellent book *Agresja 17 września* (Aggression on September 17), which we will quote many times, estimated that the losses of the Polish Army on the eastern front would probably not exceed the losses our army suffered in the 1939 campaign. This means that around 60,000 Poles would have died. 60,000 instead of several million.

After the joint attack by Poland and Germany on the Soviet Union, our lands would not only have avoided occupation, but would probably not even have been affected by serious aerial bombardment. As we know, in the first days of Operation Barbarossa, the Red Army's air force was almost completely destroyed at airports and lost its ability to conduct offensive operations. In Warsaw, which had already lost 12% of its buildings during the German siege in 1939, not even a newspaper kiosk would have been damaged. Not to mention the Royal Castle, which was burned down by German missiles.

It should also be remembered that our police and military police would have been operating throughout Poland during the entire war. Large units of mobilized troops would have been stationed in barracks. In such a situation, any anti-Polish actions by the armed units of the Ukrainian nationalist underground would have been simply suicidal for them. If OUN/UPA formations had started attacking Polish villages in Volhynia or Eastern Galicia, they would have been simply torn to shreds by Polish bayonets. And the trees along the entire length of the road from Lutsk to Stanislaviv would have bent under the weight of their hanged tormentors.

In discussions about 1939, I have repeatedly heard the following emotional arguments from debaters: "Alliance with such a terrible person as Hitler? Never!", "It would

be beneath our nation's dignity!", "What would the world think of us?", "It would simply be inappropriate!", "Can you imagine the bad press we would have had in London and New York?", "We would never shake off the label of anti-Semites and fascists."

Ladies and gentlemen, please understand that this was not about public relations. It was not about what someone in distant, safe New York would think about Poland and the decisions it had made. The stakes were much higher than all those platitudes. It was about the physical survival of the citizens of the Republic of Poland. The primary duty of state authorities is to ensure the safety of the people entrusted to them by all available means, not to care about their good image in the world.

In 1947, Kazimierz Okulicz, a well-known Vilnius journalist and former member of the BBWR, published an article entitled *Józef Beck's Hour of Trial* in the London-based newspaper Wiadomości. In it, he unambiguously suggested that the last head of diplomacy of the Second Polish Republic should have reached a modus vivendi with the Third Reich and brought about the collapse of the Soviet Union. "Whatever sacrifices would have been necessary at the time would not have resulted in the loss of territory or the destruction of our state machinery and armed forces," wrote Okulicz. "I do not know whether the Polish nation was mentally capable of such a great maneuver in 1939. However, the history of a nation that has all the conditions for a free and creative life cannot consist of short ups and long downs. A balance must be found and the nation must be given a basic assurance of continuity of existence. I am convinced that this tactical sacrifice was the only chance to avoid the catastrophe and humiliation that befell the Polish nation."

So, let me repeat once again: the most important benefit that the Republic of Poland would gain from entering into an alliance with Hitler would be the preservation of the biological substance of the nation. By agreeing to painful concessions in 1939, we might have tarnished our honor, but we would have saved the lives of millions of people. I have several million arguments to support the thesis that it was necessary to conclude an alliance with Germany. Every Polish citizen murdered by the occupiers is such an argument.

On the first anniversary of the outbreak of war, Biuletyn Informacyjny (Information Bulletin) – the most important Polish underground magazine – published an article devoted to the September campaign, which included the following words: "The decision to wage a defensive war against Germany was a decision made by the entire Polish nation. The fact that we stood up against Germany in the current war was not the result of political calculations. We were compelled to do so by the instinct of the nation to defend the life of the nation." I have the exact opposite opinion. By entering into war with both the Third Reich and the Soviet Union in September 1939, the Poles acted against their instinct for self-preservation.

Chapter 3

Gain time, strengthen the army

By forming a temporary alliance with Hitler and thereby gaining two invaluable years of peace, Poland could have not only saved millions of its citizens from physical extermination. It could also have made good use of the time gained by preparing its armed forces for the second stage of the war. This would have been invaluable to us. One of the main reasons for all the misfortunes that befell Poland after 1939 was that the war broke out too early for us.

In September 1939, the Republic of Poland was not ready to engage in total armed conflict with Germany. The Polish Army was too poorly equipped compared to the Wehrmacht. We lacked heavy equipment – tanks, artillery, and aircraft – as well as modern means of communication. In a situation where we had to defend ourselves and retreat quickly, the organization also failed.

The unfortunate Ksawery Pruszyński described the following conversation:

"How are our guys fighting?" asked a socialist activist of a wounded Polish officer he met in September 1939 between Katowice and Warsaw.

"Our people aren't fighting. Our people are dying," replied the wounded man. "A man can fight another man. But when a machine comes up against a man, the man, defenseless against the machine, can only die."

The book you are holding in your hands is a political book, and I do not really discuss strictly military issues in it. In this chapter, however, I must depart from this rule, as it is necessary in order to properly shed light on the problem.

Unfortunately, the military operations in September 1939 exposed the incompetence of some of our commanders in many cases. However, many others fought excellently, despite very difficult conditions. These were not always imposed by the enemy. There was a lack of maps, means of communication, ammunition, food, and supplies. The country's transport system was completely paralyzed, with traffic jams caused by masses of refugees (why did the police and military police let these people onto the roads? The exodus of officials and dignitaries, which caused the state to virtually cease functioning. Lack of contact with the commander-in-chief's staff.

The latter problem was particularly acute, as it caused the war to quickly turn into a series of wild semi-guerrilla skirmishes. Or rather, a series of small wars fought independently by individual commanders.

"This was perhaps Śmigły-Rydz's biggest mistake," said Professor Paweł Wieczorkiewicz. "It should have been anticipated that a communications system based on civilian networks and telephones would quickly be paralyzed. Practically by the end of the second day of the war, the commander-in-chief had lost the ability to command effectively. He had not created a flexible structure in advance within which, for example, front commanders could replace him. Instead, influenced by Piłsudski's experiences and concepts, he created an extremely centralized system. What was good in 1920 proved fatal in 1939. In addition, Śmigły-Rydz, overestimating the importance of military secrecy, did not share his broader ideas and plans with army commanders. They only knew what to do in the first days of the war. After that, they had to improvise. On the Polish side, it was therefore a war of army commanders or division commanders, but not of the commander-in-chief.

One of the most accurate descriptions of the Polish-German war of 1939 in Polish literature was written by Melchior Wańkowicz in his *book Monte Cassino*. It was a very succinct description: "Young boys in their luxurious sleeping bags, well-fed and well-rested, spread out for the night in cottages, supplied with everything they needed, while we scurried through the groves around these villages, like wolves with sunken sides, like forest animals cornered by a hunt.".

All this begs the question: if Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz prepared Poland so poorly for war in 1939, how can we be sure that he would have prepared it better for war in 1941? Perhaps our dreams of a great conquest of the Soviet Union would have been quickly verified on the battlefield: the Red Army would have given us a beating, dispersed our army, and the Wehrmacht would have been of no use to us on the Eastern Front?

To answer these questions, we must first take a close look at the 1939 campaign itself and our army at that time. Why did this war turn out so disastrously for us? Did really result from – as for years communist propaganda claimed – the civilizational backwardness of “lordly Poland”? From the indolence of the “fascist Sanation regime,” which preferred to spend millions on lavish parties in Adria, other people’s wives, and limousines instead of missiles and tanks? In the light of new historical research, free from the Marxist bias of historiography practiced during the Soviet occupation, all this turns out to be false.

In the years leading up to the war, Poland made enormous efforts to rearm and build a powerful, modern army. This task was extremely ambitious, as it was necessary to make up for years of neglect and the period of the Great Depression. Rydz himself said that when he took command after Piłsudski's death, "he found a state of mobilization threatening disaster. There was not a single anti-aircraft gun, not a single machine gun, except for the junk from 1920." This is, of course, a gross exaggeration, but these words well reflect the enormity of the task facing the Polish command at the time when the European arms race of the late 1930s began.

In order to join it, in 1936 the military authorities initiated a colossal Polish Army Expansion Program. According to this program, our army was to become more powerful and modern every year. It was assumed that the optimal level would be reached in 1942. The military received 700 million zlotys annually, while the entire state budget was 3-4 billion. Today, when the military budget does not exceed two percent of GDP, this is simply unimaginable.

The outbreak of war interrupted this great undertaking roughly halfway through. However, if the conflict had been avoided in 1939, the Polish army would have become more powerful with each passing week and month. Gaining two years would have allowed the program to be almost completed. In 1941, a completely different Polish Army would have entered the conflict with the Soviet Union than the one that went to war with Germany in 1939. It would have been larger, more modern, and significantly better armed.

The second reason for such a rapid and devastating defeat of the Polish Army in its clash with the Wehrmacht was that the Polish army was not optimized for the kind of conflict in which it found itself. It had been prepared primarily for war with... a completely different opponent. Throughout almost the entire interwar period, the Polish military authorities considered the Soviet Union, rather than Germany, to be the greatest threat. It was mainly in preparation for a possible conflict with the Soviet Union that our armed forces were built up. They were trained, equipped, and armed for a conflict with the Soviet Union.

Although at first glance the issue may seem incomprehensible—after all, if the military is good, it can deal with anyone—the difference is enormous. Fighting *each* opponent requires completely different tactics, different weapons, and different organization. It's like fighting natural disasters. Although firefighters fight both fires and floods, they have to use different methods in each case.

Let's imagine the following situation. The water level in the Vistula River is rising and flood barriers are breaking in Warsaw. Fortunately, fire trucks arrive at the scene at the last minute. Firefighters jump out, pull out rubber hoses, and start... pouring water on the Vistula River. Or vice versa—the city is on fire, and instead of pouring water on the buildings, firefighters cover the basements with sandbags. This is because they did not bring rubber hoses with them.

The situation was similar with the Germans and the Soviets. Different equipment and methods had to be used in the fight against our western neighbor, and different ones against our eastern neighbor. This was due to the structure of the armed forces of both countries, but above all to the different conditions on the battlefield. Warfare is conducted differently in cramped Central Europe than in the vast territories of the eastern part of our continent. The difference is roughly the same as between tennis and ping-pong. No one in their right mind would play tennis with a ping-pong paddle, or vice versa – no one would play ping-pong with a tennis racket.

When traveling by train, you have probably noticed maps of the Polish railway network displayed in the corridors. At first glance, it is clear that western and eastern Poland are two different worlds. In the former Prussian partition, the railway network is extremely dense, while in the former Russian partition, it is extremely sparse. The same applies to roads, and these disparities were even greater in the 1930s, when Poland extended much further east.

A glance at *the* 1939 *Statistical Yearbook* is enough to see that before the war, there were 9,085 km of paved roads in the Poznań Province. In the eastern territories bordering the Soviet Union, the situation was as follows: in the Vilnius Province – 2,067 km, in the Nowogródek Province – 2,214 km, in the Polesie Province – 1,087 km, in the Volhynia Province – 1,492 km, in the Tarnopol Province – 3,493 km, and in the Stanisławów Province – 3,100 km. In the Soviet Union, the situation was even worse.

It does not take an expert to conclude that the army fighting the Germans in the west should be largely equipped with wheeled transport and modern armored vehicles. The army fighting the Soviets in the east, on the other hand, should be much "lighter." More maneuverable, faster, and able to cope without paved roads, railways, warehouses, and regular supplies of gasoline and diesel fuel.

This means that everything that proved to be our weakness in the clash with Germany in 1939 would be our strength in the clash with the Soviets.

For decades, opinions about the army of the Second Polish Republic were shaped by Marxist "historians" whose task was to discredit and vilify the state. To this day, their theses are uncritically repeated by legions of their disciples and students educated on their books. Fortunately, however, in recent years, young scholars have emerged who are researching these issues from a new, independent perspective. The results of their work are phenomenal and contradict the theses of communist propaganda.

In the following considerations, I will mainly rely on the works of Tymoteusz Pawłowski: *Attention! Tanks!*, *Marshal Śmigły's Army*, and *Aviation in the 1930s in Poland and around the world*, as well as Edward Malak's book *Prototypes of Combat Aircraft and Aviation Plants. Poland 1930–1939*. Rafał Ziemkiewicz has already drawn attention to both authors in his article *Nie ta wojna* (Not This War), published in Rzeczpospolita.

"The stereotype of the Polish army as extremely backward and underarmed was convenient for everyone," wrote Ziemkiewicz. "For the Sanacja movement, because it allowed them to justify everything with a lack of money. For its émigré enemies, because it allowed them to blame those who did not rearm the army. For communist historiography, because it fit in with the myth of capitalist Poland's backwardness and its 'house of cards'. When a stereotype is convenient for so many different options, a wise person should immediately become suspicious. However, if we compare specific data, the Polish army of September turns out to be in many respects even more

modern compared to others. Pawłowski writes extensively about this, describing its organizational system, similar to that currently in force in NATO, the mobility of its subunits, their saturation with anti-aircraft weapons, etc.

The German army had a crushing numerical advantage over us (especially since the Polish government did not announce mobilization in time), but there was no technological gap. It was an army created for war with Bolshevik Russia. And here we must recognize the long-overlooked, yet quite obvious cause of the catastrophe. The entire Polish army was conceived and prepared for war in the east. We were well prepared. Just not for this war.

Let's start with the cavalry. It was the cavalry that became a grim symbol of Poland's defeat in the 1939 campaign. The false image of a Polish cavalryman passionately slashing at the steel armor of a German tank with his saber was intended to show Poland's civilizational backwardness and the primitive level of our military thinking. The paradox, however, is that in reality, our cavalry fought excellently in 1939. It was able to outmaneuver German tanks, strike unexpectedly, and escape pursuit.

"It proved to be the best anti-tank defense," said Professor Paweł Wieczorkiewicz. "It was richly equipped with anti-tank guns, faster and more mobile than infantry." However, this formation could only demonstrate its full combat value in a confrontation for which it had been prepared for twenty years. Not with Germany, but with the Soviet Union. Not with the Wehrmacht, but with the Red Army.

Let us give the floor to Tymoteusz Pawłowski: "The vast expanses of eastern Poland: Lithuania, Polesie, Volhynia, and Podolia, required an army capable of quickly traversing them. Unfortunately, the roads in this area were of poor quality and few in number. An even sparser network of roads was found on the other side of the border: in the Minsk, Zhytomyr, and Kiev regions, not to mention Russian territories. The condition of the roads ruled out the use of motorized transport, even though it was much cheaper to deploy and maintain [than horses]. Units consisting solely of infantry were also insufficient for quick and efficient operations in such terrain due to their slow speed of movement and, above all, their slow and heavy wagons. The type of troops that could perform tasks that did not require heavy firepower or high resistance to enemy fire was the cavalry.

Indeed, in the few clashes between the Polish Army and the Red Army in 1939 – due to Rydz's shameful order that the Polish Army should avoid fighting the invading Bolsheviks – the Polish cavalry proved its enormous effectiveness.

Here is a characteristic excerpt from the account of Wincenty Surynta, a soldier of the KOP squadron "Krasne": "The first pair, after reaching the grove, signals that the 'road is clear'. So we all gallop off. As we race across the field, we suddenly see a large detachment of Soviet cavalry walking at a trot across our path. Without orders, without slowing down, all sabers fly out of their scabbards as one. We gallop towards the grove. They were stunned, and that moment was the most enjoyable adventure of my life. The confusion that ensued in the Bolshevik column is difficult to describe. Without being cut down or beaten, the "cavalrymen" fell from their horses, while others fled in the same direction as us, toward the saving grove. Shouts *of "run*, *run*, *white ones*" rang out from the side. And we, led by Corporal Miłosz, galloped like in training, sabers flashing, a magnificent charge.

The Polish cavalry proved itself not only in combat against regular units of the Red Army, but also against the communist fifth column, which always becomes active behind the lines of the fighting army when confronted with the Soviets. Polish squadrons were able to quickly move to successive towns affected by the revolt and quickly quell the rebellions. The cavalry was also an excellent tool for catching saboteurs operating in open spaces.

Two years later, the Germans realized how much cavalry was needed on the Eastern Front. As Pawłowski writes, the decision to disband the Wehrmacht's only cavalry division, the 1st Cavalry Division, in November 1941 was a serious mistake. The Germans later rushed to build cavalry units. Two Waffen SS cavalry divisions (the 8th and 22nd) and two Cossack divisions (the 1st and 2nd) were formed. In addition, there were a number of smaller reconnaissance units.

In the confrontation with the Red Army across the vast expanses of the Soviet Union, having cavalry proved to be a necessity. This was because gasoline was difficult to obtain there, while fodder was easier to find. The fighting took place at a rapid pace, often far from supply and communication lines. Horses also performed much better than wheeled vehicles in the fall and winter, when Soviet roads virtually ceased to exist. The Italians and other German allies also successfully used cavalry on the Eastern Front.

According to the aforementioned plan for the expansion of the Polish Army, our cavalry was to be significantly strengthened. It was to be even more saturated with anti-tank equipment and machine guns. Before September, there was not enough time to arm it with wz. 36 grenade launchers. However, there was very little time left, and by 1941 this would certainly have been dealt with. This would have meant that, fighting the Red Army on the eastern front, the Polish cavalry could have been an extremely dangerous opponent for the poorly trained, slow-moving Soviet troops.

"The cavalry of the Second Polish Republic," writes Pawłowski, "contrary to the opinions of Marxist historians, was a modern and effective weapon. Its role did not end with the end of World War I. The next war proved that there was still a place for it on the battlefield. However, it is difficult for historians of the Polish People's Republic to show where the Polish cavalry belonged. Like no other branch of the military, it was destined to fight the Soviets. It would have performed very important operations in both directions, both in the dense Belarusian forests and swamps, and on the Ukrainian wilderness plains and steppes. Ironically, it also proved itself in the fight against the Germans."

Let us now look at another type of weapon – the navy. As we know, a large part of our naval forces did not take part in the fighting against Germany during the 1939 campaign. The ships were almost immediately evacuated to Great Britain and only fought alongside the Royal Navy in the next phase of World War II. This was because the Polish Army command had concluded, even before the outbreak of hostilities, that we had no chance against the Kriegsmarine. Engaging in combat with the powerful German navy in such a small body of water as the Baltic Sea would only mean wasting these vessels.

This situation raises the question: Were the plans to expand the Polish military drawn up by complete idiots? If it was known that we were unable to fight the Germans in the Baltic Sea, why were warships built and purchased at such great expense? So that when war broke out, they could sail to Great Britain and defend foreign territory? That's money down the drain. Shouldn't we have bought more tanks or planes instead?

Well, no – the plans to expand the Polish army were not the work of complete idiots. The answer to all these questions may be surprising. The Polish Navy was built with a different enemy in mind. From the very beginning, its commanders assumed that it would not stand a chance against the Kriegsmarine. It was therefore created almost exclusively to face the Soviet Baltic Fleet. Our naval staff only took such a conflict seriously, because only with the Soviets could we engage in an equal fight on our seas.

If the war had not suddenly interrupted the extremely ambitious plan to develop our naval forces, they would have had the most modern equipment at their disposal in 1942. They would also have been a considerable force.

The fleet would have included a large minelayer, six destroyers, eight submarines, twelve minesweepers, and a number of auxiliary vessels. All this together would have had a serious chance not only to face, but even to defeat the communist Baltic Fleet.

There were two objectives of the naval war with the Soviets. First, to cut off Stalin's empire from maritime supplies from the West. Polish submarines and other vessels were to hunt down convoys carrying equipment and war materials that the Bolsheviks would import from their Western allies. "The USSR's Baltic communication lines," writes Pawłowski, "were the most convenient, useful, and shortest for the Soviets. History has shown that cutting off the Moscow principality or Russia from trade contact with the world led to its imminent collapse. This was the case both in the times of Ivan the Terrible and in the times of Nicholas II. The Baltic sea routes were a sensitive target, as the USSR was surrounded on all sides by vast wilderness or by hostile states."

The second objective of the confrontation in the Baltic Sea was to destroy the enemy fleet. The Poles intended to take advantage of the geographical conditions to achieve this. Before the start of hostilities, three Polish submarine minelayers were to sail to the very exit of the Kronstadt base of the Baltic Fleet and thoroughly mine it. The first Soviet ships would thus be blown up at the gates of their home port.

Then, on its way to Poland, the Baltic Fleet would have to pass through the narrow strait of the Gulf of Finland, which was "narrow, long, and shallow—a body of water perfect for mine warfare." The task of mining the Gulf of Finland was to be carried out by the minelayer ORP *Gryf*. This ship, purchased in France for over PLN 13 million (without artillery!), was to make only this one voyage during the war! No wonder that communist historiography after 1945 was particularly harsh on this vessel, accusing the authorities of the Second Polish Republic of making a senseless purchase.

But let us return to the simulation of a Polish-Soviet war at sea. So, Soviet ships are blown up twice by Polish mines – first near Kronstadt, and then in the Gulf of Finland. This would probably offset the numerical superiority of the Baltic Fleet over our navy. However, some Soviet ships would still break through to the Baltic Sea. There, Polish submarines equipped with a huge number of torpedoes would be waiting for them. Among others, *the* very fast *Orzeł* and *Sęp*. When arming these ships, the main consideration was also submarine warfare with the Soviets and preparing them to hunt down Bolshevik vessels.

Another ring of Polish defense was to be provided by specially designed destroyers, including *Błyskawica* and *Grom*. Behind them, just in case, were the fortifications of Hel, equipped with the heaviest coastal guns purchased specifically to defend against the Soviets. Bolshevik units would also have to face the Polish Navy's air force.

However, the chances of any Baltic Fleet vessel reaching the coast of the Republic of Poland were slim. At most, the waves would wash up twisted, charred pieces of Bolshevik armor torn apart by Polish torpedoes onto the beaches of Władysławowo. We would have given them a second Tsushima in the Baltic Sea.

And we are only talking about a situation in which we would have to fight the Soviets alone. If the Polish Navy had cooperated with the Kriegsmarine in the Baltic Sea, the Bolsheviks would not even have had a reason to leave port. It would have been best if they had sunk their ships in Kronstadt and saved us and themselves the trouble.

In 1941, when a Polish-German attack on the Soviet Union would most likely have taken place, our air force would also have looked completely different. Poles before the war

They produced the excellent twin-engine PZL.37 *Łoś* bomber. Unfortunately, by 1939, only 36 fully armed and operational bombers of this type had been delivered to the army and incorporated into its units. It can be assumed that if the war had broken out in 1941, with the intensification of production from the factory lines, many more could have been produced.

What is more, Polish engineers were already working on another, even better version of this machine, with the working name PZL.49 *Miś*. It was to have a longer range and be able to carry three tons of bombs. There were also plans to build *Sum* bombers, machines that would be ideal for bombing and razing the Red Army's airfields located near the Polish border to the ground.

The lack of modern fighter planes was a problem for Polish aviation. Although our PZL P.11s were not that bad, more modern equipment would have been useful. However, the war interrupted work on the very promising PZL.38 *Wilk*, PZL.48 Lampart, and PZL.54 *Ryś* models. For example, *the Lampart* was supposed to make its first flights in 1940.

The PZL.50 *Jastrząb* fighter entered production in September 1939. According to experts, this aircraft would have been on par with the machines of the leading European powers in the 1940s. It came very close to being adopted by the Polish Army, and in significant numbers.

As Pawłowski emphasizes, military operations in Spain between 1936 and 1939 were meticulously analyzed in Poland. Above all, Soviet pilots were closely observed. “The Spanish experience showed that an air force with an organization and equipment similar to that of the Polish Army is strong enough to deter an air force organized along Soviet lines,” writes the historian.

While the PZL P.11 had serious problems keeping up with German fighters – although not always – it would probably have performed much better against Soviet fighters. This was confirmed by Romanian experience. After the 1939 campaign, the Romanian army took over our PZL P.11s and two years later successfully used them on the Eastern Front against the Bolsheviks.

I should devote some space here to a potential adversary, namely the Soviet Air Force. Let us hear from Jerzy Gruszczyński, a renowned expert in this field: "In 1939, the Soviet Air Force – although the largest in the world in terms of numbers – was not prepared to wage modern air warfare, despite unprecedented expansion, extraordinary efforts, and huge financial outlays."

A Polish expert lists the following reasons: amateurish command and a disastrous level of officer training, which was the result of purges, poor morale and skills of pilots and ground personnel (more time was devoted to communist indoctrination than to training), the terrible technical condition of the aircraft, outdated machines, problems with parts, manufacturing defects and faults, a huge number of accidents, terrible bombing accuracy, problems with cooperation in the air and flights in difficult conditions. The list goes on and on. Suffice it to say that the Soviet Air Force functioned in the same way as the entire Soviet Union (with the exception of the security services), i.e. disastrously. Its condition reflected the condition of the entire state. Factories focused on "meeting quotas" and produced a lot of machines, but most of them were junk that was downright scary to fly in. Fortunately, these machines generally did not even leave the ground, and the poor Soviet "pilots" at least did not hurt themselves.

All this was confirmed by the results achieved by the Bolshevik air force in 1939–1940 in the war with Finland and in 1941 during the unsuccessful attempt to repel the attack of the Third Reich. It did not even perform poorly at the time, but rather embarrassingly. It was certainly no Luftwaffe, and in a clash with such a "paper force," our planes would probably have fared much better. Especially after serious rearmament in 1939–1941.

According to Pawłowski's estimates, in 1941 we would have had 800 aircraft in the front line that were equal to, if not superior in quality to, Soviet aircraft. Another 1,200 would be waiting in warehouses, units, and workshops. Our air force would be capable of defending our own army and carrying out offensive operations. However, as Pawłowski admits, defending our own territory and cities would be more difficult, as the 1939 campaign had already shown.

Unfortunately, the Luftwaffe acted quite freely over Poland at that time, bombing not only military targets but also civilian ones. This is further proof that the Polish armed forces – including the air force – would have been much more effective on the offensive than on the defensive. And they would have fared much better in a war with the Soviets, whose ability to bomb Polish cities would have been close to zero, than in a war with the Germans. The Germans, who quickly gained air superiority in September 1939, which had such tragic consequences for many Poles.

Just before World War II, Poland made emergency purchases of aircraft in France and Great Britain in order to save its aviation industry from disaster. We acquired 160 Morane-Saulnier MS.406 fighters, 14 Hawker Hurricane fighters, and 100 Fairey *Battle* bombers. Of course, they did not arrive in the country on time.

However, it can be assumed with a high degree of probability that, on the same principle, we would have made substantial purchases in Germany and Italy before the war with the Soviets. In this case, there would be no question of the ordered Messerschmitts or Italian Macchis or Reggianes not arriving on time. Poland was to be the aggressor in the war with the Soviets, and it is difficult to imagine that it would not have known when the war would break out. Everything could have been planned much more reliably and accurately.

A German ally could also provide significant support to the Polish military industry with its technical expertise and parts (such as aircraft engines, which Warsaw was severely lacking). Moreover, as Pawłowski writes, in the mid-1930s, Germany itself, in an attempt to persuade Poland to enter into a closer alliance with them, offered us free aircraft. These were to be Messerschmitt Bf 109d fighters.

German technical support would have strengthened the already considerable potential of our military industry. Poland was almost self-sufficient. It was one of the world's leading manufacturers of military equipment. For example, twin-engine bombers such as *the Łoś* could only be produced by the Americans, French, Germans, British, Japanese, and Soviets, apart from us. Let us compare this with the achievements of the Third Republic in the same field...

Just like with aircraft, Germany could also supply us with tanks. Of course, such assistance would only be supplementary, as Poland's plans for expanding its armored forces were very ambitious. At the outbreak of World War II, the Polish Army had well over a hundred quite decent domestically produced 7TP tanks, which were on par with similar German models on the battlefield.

By December 31, 1939, the army was to receive another 67 of these machines. By April 30, 1940 – 121. By July 31, 1940 – 50. And so on. Each delivery would allow for the formation of another independent tank battalion. What is more, when the war broke out, Polish designers were finishing work on prototypes of newer, more modern, and heavier machines. These included the 14TP with a 47 mm anti-tank gun and the 25TP with a 75 mm gun and 80 mm thick armor.

In addition, there was the light 4TP, which was to replace the worn-out tankettes, and the planned self-propelled gun, which was to provide support for cavalry brigades. All of this could have been put into service as early as 1941, and certainly in 1942. "Armored weapons would be less numerous than armored weapons

opponents, but armed with equivalent equipment. It would be organized into independent tank battalions and four mechanized brigades. The Polish Army would have 1,500 combat vehicles at its disposal, more than half of which would be *Crusader*, T-34, or PzKpfw III tanks," writes Pawłowski.

One cannot fail to mention the Polish infantry, considered by many experts to be one of the best in Europe. Here is a characteristic opinion of General Louis Maurin, a member of the French Supreme War Council. In 1936, after observing Polish maneuvers, he said that "Polish soldiers are first-rate, resilient, and endowed with a sense of initiative that cannot be found in either Russian or German soldiers."

In 1941 or 1942, the Polish Army was supposed to have 40 divisions after mobilization, uniformly equipped and with significantly greater firepower than in 1939. Among other things, it would be well armed with machine guns (a Polish submachine gun had already been developed before the war) and cannons. Our infantry would also have modern means of communication. Due to the numerous supply columns, as Pawłowski writes, it would perform much better in the wilderness of Eastern Europe than west of the Vistula River, where it would be "quite inert and sluggish."

"I said and wrote: our army fighting against the German army is weak and will not withstand a two-week offensive," recalled Władysław Studnicki, a leading Polish Germanophile. "However, our army fighting alongside the German army, with professional German leadership, tanks, and aircraft supplied by Germany with German instructors, is a huge force securing victory in the east."

Let us add to this the enormous amounts of equipment and ammunition that were stored in Polish warehouses in 1939. We had enough of everything for almost a year of fighting. No one foresaw that the war would end as quickly as it did in reality. So the supplies were wasted or, worse, later used by our enemies. If we had marched eastward together with the Germans, we could have fired all that ammunition at the Red Army and used the equipment. Polish taxpayers' money would not have been wasted.

However, modern weapons and better organization would not be the only advantages we would have on the eastern front. Such a campaign would, above all, be much better planned and prepared. We would choose the moment to start the war, and we would act by surprise. In addition, the option of war against the Bolsheviks, the so-called "East" plan, had been repeatedly worked out during war games and exercises in the 1920s and 1930s.
"East," had been repeatedly worked out during operational games and exercises in the 1920s and 1930s.

The situation was different with the "West" plan. Its development began in March 1939, when Czechoslovakia was crushed by Germany and our strategic position changed significantly. Of course, there was no time for proper preparation, let alone rehearsing such a conflict scenario. Besides, we had a much better understanding of our eastern adversary. Ninety percent (!) of military intelligence resources were allocated to the "Soviet sector."

Jerzy Kirchmayer, then second staff officer in General Władysław Bortnowski's Toruń inspectorate, wrote: "Under these circumstances, it was possible to abandon the plan for war against Germany. It never occurred to me that we could steer towards a bilateral conflict or, while preparing for war with Russia, i.e. with a plan for that war already in place and fortifications already well advanced, suddenly turn around and fight the Germans, against whom we had neither a plan of war nor fortifications. You can turn a platoon around like that, but not a country of 35 million people..."

The Polish army was indeed terribly prepared for war. But for war with Germany. It was well prepared for war with the Soviets.

When discussing the military aspects of 1939, one cannot overlook the regrettable circumstances surrounding the mobilization of the Polish Army in 1939. Initially, it was announced for August 30, but Śmigły-Rydz postponed it by one day at the request of the French and British allies. Of course, it was too late, and as a result, chaos and confusion reigned in the ranks of the Polish army. Many conscripts did not make it to their units, and many units could not be formed.

"The cancellation of mobilization was of colossal importance. Every few hours were worth their weight in gold at that time. As a result of this decision, we deployed between two-thirds and three-quarters of the forces we could have deployed. And those several hundred thousand additional soldiers could have played a major role," said Professor Paweł Wieczorkiewicz. According to Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz, yielding to pressure from
"allies" was further proof of "Rydz's weakness of character."

Unfortunately, the commander-in-chief was not particularly successful. He was a man whom history had elevated too high. Cat-Mackiewicz wrote about Śmigły-Rydz that he was "as naive as a newborn child or a medium-sized calf," and unfortunately, this opinion is not particularly unfair to the marshal. Many of the mistakes we made during the 1939 campaign were his fault. The aforementioned cancellation of mobilization and the order not to fight the invading Bolsheviks, poor communication, and a bad operational plan. While many of our senior officers did a truly excellent job and were great professionals, Śmigły-Rydz turned out to be the wrong man in the wrong place. And that was a serious weakness of our army.

However, it is unlikely that he would have also ruined the expedition against the Soviets in 1941. There was a good chance that Śmigły-Rydz would simply not have led this campaign. In 1940, presidential elections were to be held in Poland, and the marshal, a man of almost pathological ambition, was pushing for this position. In this role, he would certainly have done less harm to Poland than as commander of its army. He would then probably have been replaced as Commander-in-Chief by General Kazimierz Sosnkowski. Unlike Śmigły-Rydz, he was an outstanding and competent figure.

In 1941, if we had been the attacking party, there could have been no question of canceling the mobilization. The Polish Army General Staff, together with the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, would have drawn up detailed plans for the upcoming campaign and set a date for its commencement. The Poles would then not only have been able to mobilize in time, but also gather the necessary supplies, switch the country to wartime mode, and calmly organize transport, communications, and the entire rear.

An attack, i.e. an action carried out on one's own terms and at a time of one's choosing, is usually better than defending against aggression. To answer the question of what would have been better: defending against the Germans in 1939 or advancing on Moscow in 1941, one need only look at a map. The length of the border with the Soviets was 1,412 kilometers and formed a more or less straight line stretching from north to south. Right in the middle of it were the vast Pripyat Marshes, a natural obstacle that would split any enemy counterattack in half. So, the conditions for waging war were excellent.

In 1939, the border with Germany and the territories under its control was 2,896 kilometers long. This border surrounded the Republic of Poland on three sides and was not based on any significant natural obstacles. In this situation, going to war with Germany was tantamount to suicide. From a professional military point of view, this war simply made no sense. In such conditions, even Napoleon Bonaparte would have taken a beating from the Germans. So what about Śmigły-Rydz?

What Poland should have done in 1939 was to delay entering the war for as long as possible. And at all costs. The Republic should have allowed other countries to bleed each other dry in the first phase of the conflict, while calmly preparing for war itself. The principle is simple: whoever enters the war first loses the war. It is exposed

because it exposes its citizens to the greatest losses and, in the event of defeat, to the mercy or displeasure of the occupier. Those who keep a cool head and enter the war last win the war. They retain the most strength, and when the conflict comes to an end, they call the shots. Avoiding war in 1939 would have been possible only if we had somehow come to an agreement with Hitler at the cost of concessions. It would have been unpleasant, but necessary.

“From the moment Munich happened,” wrote Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz, a conservative Polish journalist who will be quoted many times in this book, “everyone understood that war was coming. From that moment on, Polish politics had one and only one task: to try to ensure that Poland entered the war as late as possible, when Hitler's troops would be exhausted on other fronts. At that moment, Beck should have followed Piłsudski's formula, who had just said that Poland's task was to enter the war as late as possible. Poland had to be saved, the greatest danger had to be averted, namely that the German army would attack us first. Their attack had to be diverted from us and directed at someone better prepared than us.

A reasonable country is one that does not rush headlong into conflict, but one that waits... We should follow the example of Great Britain, which understands well this brutal truth of war – which Poles are so reluctant to accept – that wars should be fought with other people's soldiers for as long as possible. After all, London fought Hitler first with the help of the Poles, then the French, then the Soviets and the Americans. And – although the long-term consequences of World War II were disastrous for the British Empire – it won the war against Germany.

Poland should have done everything in its power, even at the cost of prestigious or territorial concessions, to deflect Germany's first attack and direct it towards the West. It should have allowed Germany to bleed itself dry in long battles with the coalition of democratic powers, and confronted it not in the first but in the last phase of the war, when it was not at its strongest but at its weakest. Then we could have faced it as an equal. And before that, we would have done humanity a huge favor and wiped the totalitarian Soviet Union off the face of the earth.

Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz called this the concept of the front line. "Our Polish political thinking, which is terribly underdeveloped and disgustingly primitive, understands neither the concept of time nor the concept of the front line," he wrote. "The average Pole, male or female, says at every opportunity: 'It's all nonsense, Hitler would have attacked us anyway, the Germans wanted to take Gdańsk from us anyway. You cannot think like that in politics. Let us assume that Hitler's attack is inevitable, but then decisive considerations regarding the element of time and the element of the first or second line come into play."

You surely remember the famous Polish war poster *Poland* first *to* fight. It is still frequently reproduced today, and one gets the impression that its message fills Poles with pride. However, this message is unwise. The fact that the Polish government decided to issue such a poster in English for propaganda purposes in the West during World War II was a mistake and shows that Poles do not understand the brutal laws that govern international politics.

Among the English, it could only have provoked ridicule. The Poles boasted that they were the first to get involved in the war, and that they were immediately beaten up. The poster shows a tattered Polish flag, which can be interpreted as follows: "They beat us up, but we're still holding on somehow." There really was and is no reason to be proud that we proved so naive and reckless that we allowed ourselves to be demolished and bled dry at the very beginning of the war, instead of saving our strength for later.

A few years ago, in a critical press review of the Second World War museum project to be built in Gdańsk, I read that the whole idea was rubbish because... the creators did not sufficiently emphasize that Poland fought alongside Hitler from the first to the last day of the war

against Hitler. And they were absolutely right not to emphasize it! Because this is not a reason to be proud, but at best proof of our political stupidity. It was precisely because of this stupidity that we lost the war.

—

Chapter 4

The return of the federal idea

Poland lost World War II miserably. In addition to enormous human losses, it suffered even greater territorial losses. We lost half of the Second Polish Republic's territory to the victorious Soviet Union. With Vilnius, Grodno, Lviv, Stanisławów, and thousands of other cities, towns, villages, and hamlets. I don't know about you, but I would have preferred my country to gain new territories at the expense of the Soviets rather than give up its own.

This was only possible in the case of a joint expedition to the East with Germany. To understand the enormous opportunities that opened up for us during World War II, we must go back to March 18, 1921, when Poland signed a disastrous peace treaty with the Bolsheviks in Riga. Our delegates, who deliberated in the famous House of the Blackheads, not only squandered the military victory achieved in 1920, but also wasted a great historical opportunity.

The Polish delegation in Riga was headed by Stanisław Grabski, a member of the National Democratic Party, who deliberately ceded huge swathes of pre-partition Poland to the Soviets. Even those that had already been conquered by our army and which the Bolshevik delegates were ready to give us. Grabski was guided by the idea of building a small Poland only for Poles, which would remain within its ethnic borders. He despised "foreigners" and wanted to "take only as many as could be assimilated."

Thus, in Riga, Polish nationalists seriously contributed to the destruction of Józef Piłsudski's grand idea – the creation of a powerful Eastern European federation. It was to consist of Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, and possibly Lithuania. This Polish-led bloc, reminiscent of the powerful Jagiellonian Republic, was to become a regional power. A state capable of resisting the ambitions of the Soviets and Germans.

It is said that history never gives a second chance. However, this is not true. What we failed to achieve in 1920, we could try again twenty years later, when Germany offered us a joint military expedition to the East.

While Germany, with its racism and insane plans to colonize the East in search of Lebensraum, had no moral right to attack the Soviet Union – Hitler wanted to replace one dictatorship with another – Poland did have such a moral right. This is because vast areas of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were under Soviet rule. The provinces of Polotsk, Vitebsk, most of Minsk, Smolensk, Mstislavl, large parts of Novogrudok and Brest-Litovsk, Chernihiv, part of Volhynia, Kiev, Podolia, and Bratslav (our possessions in the 17th century). So we had something to fight the Soviets for, and we had every right to come up with the slogan of liberating these territories.

All of this was our heritage, and during World War II, we could have claimed it and fought for it. These lands covered hundreds of thousands of square kilometers and were inhabited by at least several million representatives of the nations of the Republic of Poland: Belarusians, Ukrainians, Jews, Rusyns, Tatars, Karaites, and a dozen others. There were well over a million Poles living there (of course, we are talking about those who survived the NKVD's "Polish operation" in 1937).

All these people were in a terrible situation. For twenty years, they had been living in fear, terrorized and surveilled by the all-powerful Soviet political police . The Party

The communist regime and its propaganda apparatus subjected them to constant brainwashing. Soviet social engineering and a centrally controlled economy pushed them into abject poverty. There was not a single family in these lost eastern territories of the Republic of Poland that did not lose someone close to them in mass Soviet executions or on one of the islands of the Gulag Archipelago. A telling example is the Great Famine, the genocide of the Ukrainian peasantry carried out by the Soviets during forced collectivization. It is estimated that up to six million people may have fallen victim to it. It is often forgotten that this nightmare took place in our former eastern territories, the so-called Far Eastern Borderlands, separated from Poland by the line of the "Riga Partition."

Liberating their inhabitants from the Bolshevik yoke was Poland's moral duty due to the sense of brotherhood and special responsibility that we had and still have towards the nations that once formed the Republic with us. As evidenced by documents from that period, these people, regardless of their nationality, looked to us for salvation throughout the entire interwar period. They looked hopefully towards the western border of the Soviet juggernaut, hoping that liberation would come on Polish tanks.

Piłsudski had no intention of oppressing, denationalizing, or expelling these people. On the contrary, he wanted to protect them from Moscow's expansionism and give them sovereignty and statehood. Then, in accordance with the Jagiellonian tradition, he wanted to unite them with Poland in a federation based on common interests.

Unfortunately, Piłsudski's successors in the late 1930s departed from his ideals and "zendeczeli," as sadly evidenced by the programmatic declaration of the National Unity Camp, as well as other statements and actions by less reasonable Piłsudski supporters, who began to adopt the ideals of their master's opponent, Roman Dmowski. However, there were still many people in the Sanation camp who remained faithful to the Marshal's ideas and concepts. This was particularly true in the circles of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I do not believe that Poland – if, in 1941, in alliance with Germany, it had managed to regain at least part of its historical legacy in the East – would have implemented any nationalist ideas of assimilation and Polonization there. The recovery of Soviet-occupied Ukraine or Belarus would simply have forced Warsaw to return to the idea of a federation.

Of course, there was no question of completely restoring the 1772 border thanks to an alliance with Germany. Warsaw, sharing the territory of the conquered Soviet Union with Berlin, could not demand so much. However, preliminary exploratory talks on this subject, conducted before Beck finally decided to reject the German proposal, indicate that the Reich was prepared to cede the “southern direction” to the Republic of Poland.

Statements made by Hermann Göring in Poland since the mid-1930s suggested that the Republic of Poland could certainly count on receiving Soviet Ukraine and perhaps a large part of Belarus. This was due, in a sense, to natural historical conditions, as Germany had a very long tradition of cultural and ethnic expansion in the northern territories of the Soviet Union, while Polish influence prevailed in Belarus and Ukraine.

Let us assume, however, that in the secret protocol to the Ribbentrop–Beck Pact, we would only receive Ukraine, which – considering that Göring and other Germans had proposed this to us several times – seems very likely. The building of a federation would then have to begin with the establishment, under Polish auspices, of a Ukrainian state on the territory of the former Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, administered by the local population and Ukrainian organizations from the Second Polish Republic that were favorable to Poland, led by the Ukrainian National Democratic Union (UNDO). Henryk Józewski, the former governor of Volhynia, known for his enlightened, liberal policy towards Ukrainians, could become the link between Kiev and Warsaw.

The situation of 1920 would certainly not repeat itself, when during the Kiev expedition, Piłsudski and Petlura's slogan of building a sovereign Ukraine based on the Republic did not elicit much response from the local population. This time, after more than two decades of terrible Soviet oppression, the banning of the party

communist regime, abolishing collective farms and restoring religious freedoms would ensure us the full support of Ukrainians. However, it seems unlikely that any agreement could be reached with the radicals of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. Unless we ceded Eastern Galicia and Volhynia to the new Ukraine, but that would obviously be impossible.

Even in the first phase of the war – after defeating the Soviet Union together with the Reich – it would have been impossible to regain everything that was ours. We would have had to focus on Ukraine. However, in the second phase of the war, if we made a pro-Allied volte-face and attacked a collapsing Germany, we would remain the only player in the East and could take whatever we wanted. The border of 1772 would then be entirely achievable for Poland, federated with Ukraine and other kindred nations of the East.

I know that to the ears of a modern Pole, what I am writing now may sound like science fiction. First, for forty years, the communists convinced us that after the war, Poland had obtained "the best, fairest, and safest borders in its history." For the last twenty years, the National Democrats have been convincing us of the benefits of living in a "Piast, ethnically homogeneous nation state."

This has meant that most Poles are about as interested in our eastern territories as they are in Mozambique or Gabon. For the rest – marginalizingly referred to as the Kresy – they are a nostalgic land of Polish manors, Hasidic Jews, Orthodox churches glistening in the sun, and singing Belarusian girls harvesting grain. Folklore. Today, Poles steeped in nationalism find it difficult to imagine any other form of Polish statehood than the nation state that emerged as a result of World War II. They read the "Trilogy," which extols the multinational Republic, in the same way as *In Desert and Wilderness*. Both novels are exotic to them.

In the 1930s, however, the idea of building a powerful, multinational Republic – based on equality and harmonious coexistence between Poles, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Jews – was still alive. This was particularly true among Piłsudski's followers in the Sanacja movement. They remembered the Marshal's advice, who postulated that the Soviets should be "torn apart along national lines."

The fact that the spirit of the Jagiellonian idea was wandering the corridors of Brühl Palace, where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was located, is evidenced by diplomatic documents disclosed after the war. Let us look, for example, at the conversation Joachim von Ribbentrop had with Józef Beck in Munich in January 1939. The head of German diplomacy said at the time that after "a general, comprehensive settlement of all issues" between the Republic and the Reich, Berlin would be willing to "treat the Ukrainian question as a privilege of Poland and support Poland in every respect in its discussion."

When Ribbentrop asked the head of Polish diplomacy whether the Poles had "already given up Marshal Piłsudski's aspirations in this direction, that is, Ukraine," Beck replied that "they had even been to Kiev and that these aspirations undoubtedly still existed." When Ribbentrop arrived in Warsaw that same month, Beck "made no secret of the fact that Polish aspirations included Soviet Ukraine and a connection to the Black Sea."

Another Polish diplomat, Józef Potocki, one of Beck's closest associates, admitted that "in view of the possibility of Russia's further disintegration, various circles in our country are considering whether it would be possible to extend our borders to the east, encompassing the region of Kamieniec Podolski and Żytomierz." It is no secret that in the 1930s, there were also many influential supporters of the Promethean idea of breaking up the Soviet Union into a number of independent nation states in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This idea was very close to Marshal Piłsudski's heart.

A characteristic exchange of views on this subject took place in December 1938 between the Polish ambassador to the Soviet government, Wacław Grzybowski, and the deputy foreign minister, Jan Szembek. The ambassador, , argued that

the communist regime is growing weaker and weaker and, as a result, "the Russian problem is maturing."
"Poland should have an influence on the fate of this problem," he said.

"There was a moment in history," he continued, "when we had the decisive say in Russian affairs: it was when Żółkiewski sat in the Kremlin and negotiated with the boyars for the Moscow throne." Grzybowski added that "on the Russian issue, he personally stands by our border of 1772." And we know that this was not just his opinion. Today, most Poles have come to terms with the loss of Vilnius and Lviv – even though both cities belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth just seventy years ago – but in 1939, many of our compatriots could not come to terms with the loss of Kiev and Minsk, even though nearly 170 years had passed since the first partition. These were people made of slightly different stuff.

It is often said that in the interwar period, Poland already had enough trouble "digesting" several million "foreigners" living in its eastern territories, so why would it take on another dozen or so million Jews, Ukrainians, and Belarusians? According to this opinion, such vast areas inhabited by non-Poles were simply unnecessary for Poland and could not be maintained in the long run.

Agreed – let us repeat this once again – going east would be pointless if the Republic were to occupy these lands and copy German colonization models. In that case, all these territories would indeed be unsustainable. Even after the Polonization of Kiev, Minsk, and other major cities, they would remain Polish islands in a Ukrainian and Belarusian sea. Moreover, it is not in the nature of Poles – who themselves have suffered greatly from aggressive neighbors – to oppress other nations.

Only a madman or a fierce nationalist could implement a similar assimilationist concept in the former eastern territories of the First Polish Republic. Some Polish equivalent of the thug Adolf Hitler, who combined both of these traits.

"There is a narrow and precipitous path in the future," wrote Adolf Bocheński in his brilliant 1937 book *Between Germany and Russia*, "which leads to where every true Polish heart longs to go. To the creation of a great empire in Eastern Europe, of which we would be one of the most decisive factors. We will not discuss here whether a federation with Ukraine is desirable for the Republic of Poland. It is not easy to understand how a young Pole could not long for the restoration of Władysław IV's borders, how he could dream of Łokietek's tiny Poland. In 1920, the legal authorities of the Crimean Republic demanded that the League of Nations grant Poland a mandate over Crimea. This little-known event symbolizes the immense areas over which the power of the Republic would extend if the federalist program were implemented.

Bocheński also emphasized that pushing through such a solution after the collapse of the Soviet Union would protect Poland from Germany's growing appetites. If it created a free Ukraine and Belarus next to it, it would not be left alone with the Reich in the East.

"It is not in the interest of the Republic to protect the territorial integrity of the Soviets," wrote Bocheński, "but to resolve the issue of the 'sick man' in a way that would strengthen German imperialism as little as possible. The only such solution is to rebuild our eastern neighbor into a series of mutually neutralizing nation states based on democratic principles of governance. Poland's indifference to the German-Russian dispute can therefore only refer to the lack of protection of Russia's integrity. However, when it comes to resolving the Russian issue, Poland must come up with its own political doctrine."

Federative and Promethean ideas were alive not only among the employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but also in the army. In accordance with the Marshal's guidelines, when developing plans for war with the Soviets, our staff assumed that they would wage it not only by military means, but also by political ones. That is why in the interwar period

Warsaw strongly supported émigré communities representing nations subjugated by the Soviets in the free world. “Exposure No. 2,” writes Mieczysław Starczewski, an expert on the subject, “assumed that the emigration organized by Poland would be used to carry out diversionary and even insurrectionary activities. This would weaken the USSR and, in the long term, lead to its collapse. The command role was to be taken over by contract officers serving in the Polish Army (e.g., Georgians) and representatives of these nationalities trained in Polish military schools and universities. As a result of sabotage and insurrectionary activities, new countries and nation states would be created."

It is known that in 1936, 103 contract officers from countries oppressed by the Soviets – Ukrainians, Georgians, Caucasian highlanders, Azerbaijanis, etc. – served in our army. The Polish secret services were preparing them not only to carry out sabotage behind Soviet lines in the event of a conflict with our eastern neighbor, but above all, they were to form the nucleus of the command staff of the future armies of these countries, and earlier, of the legions created alongside Poland. The latter were to be modeled on Piłsudski's Legions, created alongside Austria-Hungary during World War I. If we had attacked the Soviets and begun to liberate the lands subjugated by them, these people would have sprung into action.

It is really difficult to imagine that Poles would manage the territories conquered in the East as foolishly and suicidally as the Germans did. Unlike them, the common sense and self-preservation instinct of Poles would not have been suppressed by sick racist ideas, which made Germans see the nations oppressed by communism not as partners, but as potential slaves. Unlike the Germans, we had hundreds of years of experience living in symbiosis with Belarusians and Ukrainians. It would certainly have been easier for us to communicate with these nations than it was for them.

I am a proponent of the theory that Germany could have taken the Soviet Union by purely military means only by marching on Moscow before the onset of winter 1941/1942, or not at all. Once Stalin's regime had survived the worst – the first powerful blow of the Wehrmacht, which shook the Soviet empire to its foundations – Bolshevism was invincible by military means. In order to bring it to its knees, a political program had to be put forward. This program should have been extremely simple and could be summed up in one word, which for nearly a quarter of a century – since the Bolshevik coup of 1917 – had haunted the dreams of the citizens of the Soviet Union. That word was "liberation."

One need only read any memoirs of German soldiers entering Soviet territory in 1941 to see how joyfully the local population welcomed the flight of the Red Commissars and the end of communist rule. The enormous political capital that grew out of this enthusiasm could have literally wiped communism off the face of the earth in a matter of months. The Germans squandered this capital through their stupidity. Through racism and brutality.

In the first few months of the campaign in the East alone – something unprecedented in the history of warfare – four million Red Army soldiers surrendered to the Germans. Not only did all these people have no desire to die for the Soviet regime that terrorized them, but many of them were ready to take up arms against it. What did Hitler do with all these people? He locked them up in terrible prisoner-of-war camps, where they starved to death, resorting to cannibalism out of desperation.

The war in the East could have been won in a few months. But only if the anti-Soviet potential of Eastern Europeans had been exploited. If the communists had been fought under the banner of liberating the nations they oppressed, rather than colonizing Slavic subhumans. The idiotic policy of the Third Reich had only one effect: hearing what the Germans were doing, the Red Army soldiers began to fight. Not for the Soviet Union and not for Stalin – whom they hated more than the Germans – but out of despair. The despair of people deprived of hope. Such people are the most dangerous opponents.

The fundamental reasons for Germany's defeat in the East were therefore political, or rather ideological, rather than military. Hitler is wrongly called the greatest criminal in history in the West. I propose a different, more appropriate nickname: "the greatest fool in history." I repeat: I do not believe that the Poles, with Eastern Europe at their feet, would make the same mistakes as this man blinded by illusions and phobias.

—

Chapter 5

Forty divisions on the eastern front

The fatalistic view of many historians and journalists that accepting the German offer "would not have changed anything" is indefensible. It boils down to the idea that no matter what we did in 1939, the Second Polish Republic was doomed to failure anyway. This belief is a remnant of the deterministic Marxist school, which, in accordance with the Soviet interpretation of history, considered interwar Poland to be a "bastard of the Treaty of Versailles" and a "seasonal state."

According to communist historians II Rzeczpospolita was a "rotten" state "fascist-capitalist" state that was simply bound to collapse at the first historical upheaval. The author of this book has a different opinion. Our defeat in 1939 was not the result of any "dialectical historical necessity" – although such a view may be more convenient – but from mistakes made by our last pre-war government.

If Józef Beck had made a different decision and, instead of entering into paper alliances with perfidious Great Britain and trembling France, had temporarily allied himself with the Third Reich, not only would we have avoided defeat, but we could even have been successful. Everything really could have turned out differently.

However, it is worth considering whether the Polish Army – even if significantly reinforced – would have actually become a decisive factor on the Eastern Front. A factor that would have determined the fall of Bolshevism. If it is true that Hitler was “one division short” near Moscow in 1941, then undoubtedly yes. The Poles would have provided him with forty divisions. A side note here: according to Andrzej Wielowieyski, Poland, after appropriate rearmament, could have fielded 50-60 divisions in 1941. However, it should be assumed that not all forces would have been sent to the Eastern Front – some of the troops would probably have remained in reserve on Polish territory.

The anecdote about "one division" that Hitler was supposed to have lacked near Moscow is, of course, a considerable exaggeration, but it accurately reflects the fact that in October 1941, the Germans were on the verge of victory on the Eastern Front. It was then that the fate of the war hung in the balance, and Operation Barbarossa came close to becoming another Blitzkrieg ending in complete victory for the Wehrmacht. As I have already written, if it was possible to defeat the Soviet Union by military means, it could only be done "on the march." The decisive factor was the great battle for Moscow, fought between October and January 1941.

With the Wehrmacht's capture of the Soviet capital, the communist regime would most likely have collapsed. The paradox was that Adolf Hitler himself did not seem to understand this. Despite the almost pleading insistence of Heinz Guderian and his other generals, he directed his main forces south, towards Ukraine. He cited the example of Napoleon, who captured Moscow in 1812 but still lost to Russia.

As a result of the Führer's misguided decisions, German divisions arrived at the Soviet capital too late, just as the harsh Russian winter of 1941-1942 was about to begin. There were also too few of them. The participation of forty or more well-equipped and battle-ready Polish divisions in the campaign could therefore have been decisive. Józef Mackiewicz convincingly refuted the thesis that the capture of Moscow would have been of little help to Adolf Hitler, just as it had been of little help to Napoleon 129 years earlier.

"In 1812, Moscow had been in existence for 665 years since it was first mentioned in 1147," wrote the eminent writer in *Nie trzeba głośno mówić* (No Need to Speak Loudly). It had been the capital of the duchy for 484 years and, since 1460, i.e. for 352 years, the capital of the tsarist regime and then the Russian Empire. It had withstood invasions, and its temporary, voluntary abandonment in 1812 did not threaten to shake the foundations of the empire. Just as the capture of one European capital or another did not determine the end of a state. Alexander I understood this, and Kutuzov understood it."

And further: “In contrast, Moscow in 1941 had been the center of international communism and the Bolshevik regime in Russia for only 24 years. It was surrounded by a sea of people, only a small percentage of whom had been convinced that this was the best system in the world. Its capture by foreign troops would inevitably mean the end of this system. [...] Stalin understood this, and so did the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party. Therefore, from the party's point of view, no strategic, tactical, military, or economic goals, nor any material goods, justified abandoning Moscow. If Bolshevism was to survive, Moscow had to be defended at all costs, literally."

Mackiewicz calculates that preparations for the defense of the Soviet capital began as early as June 27, 1941. Forty percent of the Red Army's soldiers, 35 percent of its tanks, 44 percent of its artillery, and 32 percent of its aircraft were brought to the capital. The city was tightly surrounded by five rings of defense. A state of emergency was declared on its streets, and special NKVD battalions were deployed to suppress any possible rebellion by the inhabitants.

Nevertheless, when the Muscovites heard that German tanks were approaching the suburbs, they started a counterrevolution. Renowned historian Andrew Nagorski, author of *The Greatest Battle: Moscow 1941–1942, said in an interview with Rzeczpospolita that when Stalin was driving through the streets of Moscow in his car on October 18, 1941, he was told that the Germans had already reached the city. Moscow 1941–1942*, said in an interview with Rzeczpospolita that when Stalin was driving through the streets of the capital on October 18, 1941, “he saw chaos and lawlessness engulfing the metropolis. He probably saw shops being looted, communist literature being thrown into the trash, and portraits of party leaders being burned. He was probably informed that vigilante justice and perhaps even a spontaneous rebellion were about to begin.”

scribed this spontaneous rebellion in his article *"A hair's breadth from collapse,"* published in "Uważam Rze" by journalist Piotr Skwieciński. He quotes witnesses who recounted how, starting in mid-October 1941, the entire party apparatus began to flee eastward in panic, using limousines, buses, trucks, and even the famous "black ravens" that were used to transport prisoners on a daily basis.

Moscow residents lined the roads and threw stones at speeding vehicles. In factories, under the slogan "beat the communists," vigilante justice began to be carried out on management staff, and books by Lenin, Stalin, and other Bolshevik classics were burned at the stake.

"Shreds of torn documents and Marxist brochures flew around, carried by the wind. There was not enough room for customers in women's hair salons, and 'ladies' stood in queues on the sidewalks. The Germans are coming, we need to get our hair done..." wrote literary historian Emma Gerstein.

18 On October 10, Moscow militia commander Viktor Romantchenko reported to General Ivan Serov that the decision to evacuate party activists had caused chaos and the collapse of the entire system of power. He begged for it to be stopped before it was too late.

The rebellion was crushed by the secret police, and German troops ultimately did not enter Moscow. The Soviet Union survived at the cost of enormous sacrifices. According to Soviet statistics, one million Red Army soldiers were killed, missing or taken prisoner in the Battle of Moscow, and over 900,000 were sent to military hospitals. However, the Germans were successfully repelled from the capital. If the Polish Army had taken part in the war against the Soviets, could the Red Army have actually lost the Battle of Moscow?

As I mentioned, our army would not only be very large, but also well prepared to fight on the vast expanses of the East. Excellent at knowing

the enemy – having already defeated him once in 1920 – and the realities of Eastern Europe. Moreover, they could count on the support of the local population. Poles with Soviet citizenship – who, despite Stalin's strenuous efforts to reduce their population, still densely populated the areas near the border. But also Ukrainians, Jews, and Belarusians.

"Hitler, together with the Poles, could have launched more than 240 divisions against the Soviet Union in 1940, compared to 220–230 Soviet divisions (in 1941, he launched about 190 divisions against about 240 Soviet divisions). There would have been no salvation for Stalin then," wrote Andrzej Wielowieyski in his recently published book *Na rozdrożach dziejów (At the Crossroads of History*). "Moscow would have inevitably fallen within 3–4 months, and later skirmishes and guerrilla activities in front of or behind the Urals would no longer have had any significant political or military significance. The Soviet Union would probably have been politically shattered, regardless of Hitler's policy: whether it was one of cruelty and terror or of supporting the national independence of the inhabitants of the Soviet republics.

The Soviet leadership was well aware that a military alliance between Warsaw and Berlin would pose a mortal threat to it. It was no coincidence that after Józef Beck's famous speech in the Sejm on May 5, 1939, when it became clear that this alliance would not come to pass, Vyacheslav Molotov offered such heartfelt congratulations to the Polish ambassador in Moscow, Wacław Grzybowski. The head of Bolshevik diplomacy emphasized that he liked the passage about honor the most. "He was certainly sincere, because a weight had been lifted from his heart. The dangerous threat of a German-Polish alliance had seemingly ceased to exist. Until then, all operational plans of the Red Army had considered Germany and Poland as enemies together, with Polish forces being overestimated at around seventy divisions," wrote Wielowieyski.

Indeed, in operational games and war plans prepared before 1939, Red Army staff officers considered the possibility of a confrontation on the western front with the combined forces of the Third Reich and the Republic of Poland. For example, according to Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, who considered such a scenario in the mid-1930s, an attack by this coalition could take place north of Polesia. It would probably involve eighty large German units (tactical formations) supported by thirty Polish units. "What is this? Do you want to scare the Soviet authorities?" Stalin asked him at the time. And indeed, he was scared.

There is little doubt that Poland's "yes" to the Third Reich in the spring of 1939 would have meant the end of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. If Beck had accepted Hitler's offer at the time, Joseph Stalin – one of the greatest genocidal figures in history – would have left this world not in 1953, but twelve years earlier. If he hadn't shot himself on some
"the last bastion of communism," we would have caught him and hanged him in Red Square. However, knowing his character, one can assume that after the collapse of the Bolshevik regime, he would have tried to escape and, probably, recognized at some train station or on the road, he would have been torn to pieces by the Russians themselves. Representatives of the nation that was the first and greatest victim of Bolshevism.

Ksawery Pruszyński and Stanisław Swianiewicz were also convinced that our participation in the war in the East on the side of Germany had to end in Stalin's defeat. They discussed this issue during the war, wondering what the propaganda of General Władysław Sikorski's government should look like.

"We also discussed," recalled Swianiewicz, "what the world would look like today if Poland had accepted Hitler's proposals for cooperation in Eastern policy, as some of our mutual friends were inclined to do. These proposals contained enormous dangers for Poland, but they could also have brought very real benefits. Ksawery believed that it was important for the Western world to understand that we had

the choice: either go with the Germans or risk a débâcle [defeat] in September 1939, that our cooperation could have ensured Germany's complete victory in the East, that we could have shared in the benefits of that victory, but that ultimately other considerations prevailed in our attitude.

Ksawery believed that our propaganda should be structured in such a way that the Western world would know what we had sacrificed by rejecting German proposals and embarking on a war that was bound to bring us defeat in its initial stages. One could even say that we sacrificed ourselves to protect Russia, although this was certainly not the intention of Beck, Marshal Rydz-Śmigły, or Mościcki, who were responsible for the decision; it was a paradox of history. We both agreed that if Germany ultimately lost in Russia, which was not yet clear at that moment, it would be primarily due to our attitude towards the temptations offered to us by the Nazi leaders.

Professor Jerzy Łojek wrote: “From a historical perspective, it is obvious that it would have been better to attack the USSR in alliance with Germany than to wait for a joint attack on Poland by Germany and the USSR, which would have come sooner or later. It is likely that in the situation of 1939 or 1940, a German-Polish (and, on the other hand, Japanese) attack on the Soviet Union would have completely destroyed Joseph Stalin's empire. Suffice it to recall the advance of German troops into Russia in the summer and autumn of 1941, the millions of Soviet prisoners of war easily captured by the Wehrmacht, and the almost complete collapse of Soviet power in the first months of the war with Germany. The 40 Polish divisions and brigades meant little in confrontation with the Wehrmacht. However, if they had been rearmed by German industry, they could have meant a lot in an attack on the USSR.

Polish support would result in an even faster advance of the allied forces into the territory of the Soviet colossus. It is also worth mentioning a "minor" detail that could have had a colossal impact on the course of the campaign. If our alternative scenario had been realized, the starting positions of the armies attacking the Soviets would have been almost 300 kilometers further east than they actually were.

The Germans would have started not from the demarcation line running through half of the territory of Poland, which had been dismantled by them and the Soviets, but from its eastern border. As a result, they could have reached Moscow much earlier. Military historians agree that the reason for Hitler's defeat in this first, decisive campaign of 1941 was a lack of time. On the night of October 6-7, four days after the start of the German general attack on the Soviet capital, the first snow fell near Moscow...

Chapter 6

Hitler's cows in the Urals

In discussions about the Polish elections in September 1939, another alternative scenario often arises. According to this scenario, Poland's participation would indeed have ensured Hitler's victory in the clash with the Soviet Union. However, the German dictator would have had no intention of sharing the East with us. After jointly overthrowing the communist empire, the leader of the Third Reich would have decided that "the job was done" and would have turned his attention to us. He would have taken advantage of the fact that German troops were stationed in Poland and the Polish Army was occupying Ukraine, and would have taken Warsaw.

"Polish divisions would have suffered much heavier losses on the Eastern Front than during the September campaign," said historian Professor Stanisław Żerko in an interview with Gazeta Wyborcza. "Poland would probably have emerged from the war as a weakened country, surrounded by Germany on all sides. It is also unclear what would have become of the former Prussian partition. In any case, the prospect of Poland being transformed into a 'protectorate of Lesser Poland and Mazovia' would also have to be taken into account."

Józef Beck himself spoke of such a scenario. He also agreed with the view that the Polish Army would tip the scales of victory on the Eastern Front in favor of the Third Reich, but he was convinced that such an expedition would end in disaster for Poland anyway. "We would defeat Russia, and then we would herd Hitler's cows in the Urals," the former head of Polish diplomacy is said to have remarked during his internment in Romania.

At first glance, such a scenario does seem plausible. It is the winter of 1941/1942. The Soviet Union ceases to exist. Poland and Germany divide the conquered territories between themselves, but relations between the victorious allies, who have never been particularly fond of each other, are disastrous. Germany comes to the conclusion – and rightly so! – that a regional power has suddenly emerged under their noses, which may pose a serious threat to them in the future. Without much thought, they would quickly pacify us.

By doing so, Germany would become the sole and undisputed master of the post-Soviet East. It could calmly pursue its insane colonization projects, all those master plans and "final solutions," without any nagging Polacks getting in the way. Something like this would be in Hitler's style. It would be in line with his mentality, but also with his practice. On several occasions, the Wehrmacht took control of its allies' territories as a result of rapid operations.

This is what happened with Italy in 1943 and Hungary in 1944. Germany tried to do the same in Romania. In the latter two cases, Berlin decided to replace pragmatic governments that had allied themselves with the Reich for geopolitical reasons (the regimes of Miklós Horthy and Ion Antonescu) with collaborationist governments of a fascist nature.

There is only one problem. All this took place in a completely different strategic situation than the one we are considering. In all three cases, Germany simply had no other choice. They were not eager to occupy these countries, as it would have required the deployment of considerable forces needed on other fronts. However, they had to do it, as it seemed that these allies might switch sides to the Allies. Failure to intervene would have entailed enormous strategic risk for the Reich. It could even have meant losing the entire war.

In the event of an attack on Poland after the joint destruction of the Soviet Union, the opposite would be true. An attack on a Polish ally would involve considerable risk. Let's look at the situation. It is spring 1942. The Soviet regime has collapsed, the Poles have taken Ukraine, the Romanians have taken Odessa, the Finns have taken Soviet Karelia, and the Japanese have taken a chunk of Siberia.

For the Germans, there is still... well over 15 million square kilometers left! Can you imagine what a gigantic task it is to manage such a space? After all, everything has to be sorted out after the Bolsheviks. It has to be taken over by the administration, decommunized, and, above all, occupied by the army and military police. Cities, ports, roads, railway junctions, and highways.

Knowing the cruel, ruthless methods of the Third Reich's occupation, one can be sure that a partisan movement would immediately arise in the conquered territories. The forests would be swarming with both Russian troops and representatives of other nationalities inhabiting the territories that had previously belonged to the Soviet Union. The collapse of internationalism
The "evil empire" would certainly, as happened in 1991, awaken local nationalisms that had been suppressed until then. Weapons would be plentiful on the ground after the Red Army had scattered in all directions.

All this would require the involvement of ever greater forces to maintain the conquered territory. Maintaining such order would be a task requiring the exertion of all the free forces of the Reich. Let us remember that it was still at war with Great Britain and the United States, and military operations on that front were intensifying with each passing day. Germany would probably not only fight the Western Allies in North Africa and on the oceans, but also in Asia. It is known that after defeating the Soviets, Hitler planned to attack the British Middle East and then India.

If Hitler had actually wanted to turn the territories conquered at the expense of the Soviet Union into Lebensraum for German farmers and had begun to bring settlers to the East and displace the local population, Germany would have had its hands full there for fifty years. Or even longer. This would have meant that the Third Reich, instead of being strengthened by its victory over the Soviets, would have begun to weaken more and more.

In 2006, nature lovers stumbled upon an unusual find in Florida's Everglades National Park. The photos they took at the time went viral around the world. On the surface of the water, near dense, swampy reeds, floated a huge, mangled, dead animal with two scaly tails.

Upon closer examination of the carcass, it turned out that it was not one animal, but two. A fierce battle between two beasts had recently taken place at this spot. A four-meter-long tiger python attacked a giant alligator weighing several hundred kilograms. The snake managed to kill and swallow its opponent. However, the alligator turned out to be too big. The python was unable to digest it, and the dead body of the crocodile tore open the snake's belly. It was the twisted corpses of both beasts that were found by American nature lovers.

The same would be true of Hitler. Even after defeating the Soviets, the vast Russian territories would be a meal that the Reich would have to devote all its strength to digesting. The belly of the beast would be bursting at the seams, and it would be difficult to expect it to have an appetite for another course. A joint conquest of the Bolsheviks with Germany would therefore reduce, rather than increase, the threat posed by the Reich to Poland.

In his book *Co by było, gdyby... (What if...*), whose authors conducted a series of interviews with leading Polish historians, Professor Andrzej Ajnenkiel concluded that Beck had done the right thing in rejecting Hitler's offer. Among other reasons, the professor argued that after a joint victory in the East, Germany would have turned its attention to us. "Constant conflicts with an increasingly powerful ally threatened
"quislingization" of the government, and opposition and a mood of rebellion against such a situation would grow in society.

the attitude of the authorities. And a very simple relationship would apply here. The better the Third Reich fared, the worse its Polish ally would fare. I agree with the professor one hundred percent. This relationship would indeed exist. However, after the joint defeat of the Soviets, the Third Reich would fare increasingly worse, and thus its Polish ally would fare increasingly better.

Let us give the floor to Adolf Bocheński, who wrote in 1937 in *Between Germany and Russia*: "Such a conflict would probably result in the complete collapse of Russia on the one hand, and on the other, a very significant effort on the part of the German Reich, putting us in an advantageous position in relation to it for some time. In our era, territorial gains are not able to give imperialist states such a significant increase in power as they once did; sometimes they even become a burden for them. Therefore, we should not exaggerate our fears about the strengthening of the German Reich as a result of its conflict with Russia."

Adolf Bocheński was right. Why would Hitler want another serious problem in such a situation, which would be a war with his most powerful and valuable ally on the European continent (Italy would certainly have already demonstrated its limited combat value by that time)? Germany did not have an abundance of valuable allies during World War II. And with regard to the few they did have, they never took military action first, unless forced to do so by their own actions.

Can we really seriously assume that Hitler, having gained millions of square kilometers of post-Soviet territory, would suddenly want Pomerania, Poznań, and Silesia? Why would he want yet another problem? Even if he was very keen on the raw materials from the Ukrainian territories occupied by the Poles, it would have been easier to sign a mutually beneficial trade agreement with Warsaw than to get involved in another war.

Contrary to appearances, Hitler learned his lesson from World War I and tried to do everything he could to avoid fighting on two fronts. He attacked the Soviet Union only because he believed that in 1940 he had succeeded in crushing France and neutralizing Great Britain for years to come. Attacking Poland in 1942 or 1943 would have been a classic opening of a second front. On the one hand, he would have had to fight the Anglo-Saxons, and on the other, Poland. And it can be assumed that the Poles would not have given up easily in such a situation.

Under such conditions, the Polish-German war would have been much more difficult and longer for the Wehrmacht than the September campaign. The Germans would have suffered much greater losses in equipment and manpower. Defeating the Soviet Union together with the Poles would have created completely new conditions. In a confrontation with Germany in 1942 or 1943, not only would a different Polish Army have taken part, but also a completely different Wehrmacht. We would have been stronger, and they weaker.

It would no longer be the fresh, hungry Wehrmacht that pounced on its first victim in 1939, but a tired army that had been fighting exhausting battles on several fronts with the Western Allies for two or three years. Battles that consumed vast amounts of manpower and equipment. It would be a Wehrmacht that had to deal with the occupation of half of Europe, most of the Soviet Union, and probably also large parts of the Middle East and Asia. A Wehrmacht that was facing increasing problems in the occupied territories with the Anglo-Saxon-supported guerrilla movement.

Meanwhile, the Polish Army would have become significantly stronger between 1939 and 1941. What is more, after defeating the Soviets in 1941, it would not have fought any more wars. Its only task would be to fight the much weaker partisans operating in Ukraine, which was small compared to the size of the territories seized by the Reich, than in the German occupation zone. Instead of bleeding itself dry like the Wehrmacht on several fronts, our army could calmly rearm itself. This would include millions of tons of captured Soviet equipment. It could reorganize and strengthen itself.

It could also build at least two new national armies at its side – Ukrainian (larger) and Belarusian (smaller). There would be plenty of recruits, who could be drawn from among the prisoners of the Red Army, for example. The idea of building national states allied with the Republic would also certainly result in a massive influx of volunteers. Just as during the war of 1920, when 70,000 soldiers from various anti-Bolshevik eastern units fought on our side. In 1942 or 1943, this would also have happened, and on a much larger scale. These troops could also have been armed with Soviet equipment, of which there would have been a lot left over from the Red Army, and which Ukrainian and Belarusian soldiers knew well.

Germany could only deploy a small part of its forces against Poland. After all, someone would have to fight the Anglo-Saxons in Africa and Asia. Someone would also have to maintain order in the occupied post-Soviet territories. It would also be impossible to withdraw occupation garrisons from France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Greece, and Yugoslavia.

We, on the other hand, would have deployed our entire armed forces against the Wehrmacht. That would have been sixty or even seventy divisions (during that year, another age group would have reached conscription age, and we would have been able to make up for the losses from the 1941 campaign). It would no longer be a war like the one in 1939, when Hitler threw all his might at us, and we were not prepared for it and, as a result, we were wiped out.

Another advantage for the Poles would be that a large part of the German supply lines leading to the East would run through the territory of the Republic of Poland. In the event of a German attack on Poland, these lines would be immediately cut off with a few strikes. Armies stationed in Soviet-occupied territories, cut off from the Reich, would suffer serious shortages of ammunition, equipment, and reinforcements. It should be remembered that Poland could open the way to Moscow for the Germans, but it could also close that way.

An earlier joint expedition to the Soviet Union would have involved very close cooperation between both staffs, armies, and individual units. For at least a year, the Poles would have had insight into the secrets of the Third Reich's war machine. They could use this knowledge in a possible clash. Possessing the vast territories of Ukraine would give them more operational space than in 1939. And yet, the Polish Army performed best in vast spaces.

Nevertheless, such a confrontation would most likely end in victory for the Third Reich. Poland, attacked from all sides – Prussia, the Reich, Slovakia, and the German occupation zone in the former USSR – by an increasingly powerful Germany, would sooner or later have to capitulate. However, this might have lasted six months, or perhaps even longer. It would also have forced the Third Reich, which was already slowly crumbling, to make a huge effort.

And yet victory alone would not have been enough. Something would have had to be done with defeated Poland (and Ukraine). Let us assume that Hitler would have tried to implement the program that he actually carried out in 1939. This would have involved cutting off the western territories of defeated Poland – Silesia, Poznań, and Pomerania. The central part of the Republic of Poland would have been turned into the General Government. And the eastern part would have to be given to... well, who? After all, the Soviets were long gone. To Ukraine, which was just emerging under Polish auspices? Or perhaps to the OUN/UPA? The idea was simply unrealistic.

Germany would therefore have to impose its occupation regime on the whole of Poland. Knowing the Poles and their tradition of conspiracy dating back to the Tsarist era, dozens of underground organizations and underground armies would immediately spring up. The previously peaceful supply lines connecting the Reich with its garrisons in Russia would suddenly start blowing up. At a critical point, in the very heart of German Europe, a full-scale rebellion would break out. In order to pacify the Poles, the Germans would have to maintain a significant force in their territory. Needless to say, this would have a major impact on the German effort on the Western Front.

In any case, an analysis of statements made by the leader of the Third Reich and his associates during the period when they were still trying to win Poland over to their plans clearly shows that they needed Warsaw's support in the East primarily to develop and maintain the vast territories of the Soviet Union. Hitler believed that he could deal with the Red Army quickly and without major problems. He completely underestimated it. He was only afraid of what would happen later. That is why he needed Poland and its potential so much. This makes a hypothetical German attack on Poland after the joint defeat of the Red Empire very unlikely.

Adolf Hitler was insane, but not that insane. Even he would not have dared to do something as absurd and risky as fighting Poland in such a difficult situation. It was no longer 1939, when he held all the cards. And even if he had completely lost his mind and actually conquered his ally, Poland's situation would still have been much better than it actually was. The occupation would not have begun in 1939, but in 1942 or 1943. We would have been spared several bloody years.

Chapter 7

Poland stabs the Reich in the back

At this point, we arrive at the core of the concept presented in this book. The analysis conducted in the previous chapter shows that as early as 1942, after the joint defeat of the communist juggernaut, Poland's position vis-à-vis Germany would have improved significantly compared to 1939. Even then, a conflict with the Republic of Poland could have been extremely troublesome and, in the long run, even fatal for the Wehrmacht, which was fighting simultaneously against Great Britain and the United States.

The Polish Army would have fought under better conditions than in September 1939. It would have been stronger and better armed, could have counted on its eastern allies, and most importantly, would have faced only one enemy instead of two. The first enemy would have been eliminated earlier with the help of the second. It is obvious that it would have been better to fight the Germans alone in 1942 than to fight the Germans and the Soviets in 1939.

Poland, by joining Germany in the war against the Soviet Union, would achieve what the British call *"one out, one to go*," meaning "one down, one to go."

So let us imagine now that the Polish-German conflict does not occur, which seems almost certain. In a repulsive alliance with the Third Reich, we somehow manage to hold out until 1944 or 1945. In other words, we wait almost until the end of the war, until the final clash between Germany and the Western Allies. A clash which, regardless of whether the Allies actually landed on the continent – as I wrote in the alternative scenario presented at the beginning of the book – had to end with the capitulation of the Reich in early August 1945.

At that point, the United States already had the atomic bomb, and Hitler would no longer be able to continue the war. Germany would have to surrender. And even if the Führer refused to accept this obvious conclusion, the Americans would probably have no qualms about showing him that it was not a very sensible option. Just as they treated Hiroshima and Nagasaki, they could have treated Hamburg and Dresden, for example. Instead of demolition and incendiary bombs, atomic bombs would have fallen on these German cities. That would have been the end of World War II.

A side note: Andrzej Wielowieyski assumes that after defeating the Soviet Union, Germany could transfer so many divisions to Western Europe that an Allied landing on the continent would be impossible. According to him, the war would have ended either with the dropping of an atomic bomb on Germany and its unconditional surrender, or with Great Britain and America concluding a compromise peace with the Reich. In this way, World War II, as in reality, would have turned into a cold war. Except that instead of the Soviets, the enemy of the Anglo-Saxons would be the Third Reich. Professor Stanisław Żerko also leans towards this view.

However, the latter scenario seems unlikely. The United Kingdom had two opportunities to conclude a separatist peace with Germany – in 1940 after the fall of France and in 1941 when Rudolf Hess flew to the British Isles with a peace offer. London did not take advantage of these opportunities, as it hoped that the Soviet Union and the United States would join the war against the Reich. By the time the latter entered the conflict, the war was already being fought, as Tymoteusz Pawłowski emphasizes, "the American way." Its goal was not to make peace, but to bring about the complete and final defeat of the enemy, its unconditional

surrender. The Americans wanted to eliminate a competitor for global dominance. In such a conflict, there is no room for a compromise peace.

Let us return to the situation of Poland, allied with the Reich, at the turn of 1944 and 1945. With Polish help, the Germans had defeated the Soviet Union a few years earlier, but on the Western Front, the situation of our ally looked disastrous. The participation of the United States in the war – with its enormous potential, unmatched by any other country in the history of the world – meant that the scales of victory were tipping increasingly in favor of the Western Allies.

More and more German divisions are being transferred to fight these opponents. Only less valuable units remain in the East. Inexperienced youngsters plus veterans who contracted rheumatism in the trenches at Verdun. This situation would give Poland a great opportunity to finally get rid of its "forced" ally.

At this stage of the war, Poland should have behaved like Romania and Hungary, i.e. the Central and Eastern European countries that were actually allied with the Third Reich and which, in the face of Germany's collapse on the Western Front, began secret negotiations with the Anglo-Saxons. The British and Americans were extremely eager to engage in such talks, as they understood that the defection of further elements of the alliance from the Axis would weaken the Third Reich and bring the moment of its capitulation closer.

There is no reason to believe that if Poland had remained in alliance with Hitler until the end of the war, it would have behaved differently. It would have been the only logical solution. Already in February 1939, after returning from a visit to Warsaw, the head of Italian diplomacy, Galeazzo Ciano, assumed that in the event of a war in Western Europe between Germany and Italy on one side and France and Great Britain on the other, "Poland would wait a long time with its weapons at the ready to finally join the victors." This was exactly how the war should have been played out.

I would like to reassure readers who are hostile towards Germany. Of course, during World War II, it was necessary to fight against Germany. But not when they were at their strongest, but when they were at their weakest. Not in 1939, but in 1945. Wars, which Poles fail to understand, are meant to be fought in favorable circumstances and won, not to be fought regularly, every generation or two, and get beaten up by neighbors. Wars are fought to gain territory, not to lose it.

By attacking the Third Reich in 1945, we could finally take revenge on our ally for its arrogant attitude and attempt to subjugate Poland. Above all, at the end of World War II, we would not find ourselves on the losing side. Even Beck and Śmigły-Rydz would probably understand this (assuming that both of them would have lived to see 1945 in this situation) and, seeing that the Third Reich was crumbling, they would undoubtedly have decided to change alliances.

They would begin secret negotiations with Great Britain and the United States in some neutral country, and then throw their still considerable and relatively unscathed (it is 1945, and the Soviet campaign ended in 1941!) forces at Hitler's rear. Both against the German occupation forces in the post-Soviet territories and against East Prussia and the Reich proper.

It should not be forgotten that during the 1939 campaign, Poland was cursed by the disastrous course of the Polish-German border, but this also worked the other way around. If Poland had attacked Germany, it could have immediately paralyzed the whole of East Prussia and very quickly found itself at the gates of Berlin. It was only 200 kilometers from the western border of the Second Polish Republic to the capital of the Reich.

In the previous chapter, I wrote that already in 1942, the balance of power between the Polish Army and the Wehrmacht would not have been as disastrous as it was in 1939. And what about 1945, when Germany, with its remaining forces, would be fighting a war against the Anglo-Saxons advancing on its western borders? One could venture to say that Poland's intervention at that time could have been the decisive blow that would have brought down the Third Reich.

"Poland could have avoided disaster only by dividing the war into two phases," wrote Jerzy Łojek. "The phase of war in the east and the subsequent phase of war in western and southern Europe. Such a development of the war was sometimes discussed in Polish circles in 1941–1943, dreaming of a repeat of the history of World War I: first, Germany decisively defeats Russia, then the Western Allies defeat the Reich, and finally Poland rises up again to fight, regaining full independence. It was not understood that such a turn of events would only be possible with Poland's active participation in the first phase of the war – not on the side on which the Republic of Poland actually found itself.

And further: "It would be a matter of waiting for the moment when the Allies became stronger than Germany in the conflict, while surviving the most dangerous period alongside Germany and, together with Germany, destroying Stalinist Russia, so that the Allies would lose for a long time any possibility of ever finding a significant ally in Moscow. The idea was to wait, with minimal losses and after removing the danger from the East, for the second phase of the great war: the decisive clash between the West and the Axis.

One cannot blame Józef Beck for forming an alliance with Western democratic countries. They were, of course, much more appealing allies than the repulsive racist and anti-Semite Adolf Hitler. However, Beck's unforgivable mistake was that he formed an alliance with the Western Allies a few years too early. Before the Soviet Union was defeated. Because only then, if it had been defeated, would we have become a real, desirable ally for Paris and London in Eastern Europe. Then we would have been truly needed by them, and then they would have truly taken us into account.

So first, together with the Germans, it was necessary to get rid of one of Poland's mortal enemies, and then, together with the Western Allies, the other. It simply could not have been done in any other order. I will now write what I consider to be the most important sentence in this book. Its most important thesis.

Poland could only regain full independence and sovereignty after World War II if the Soviet Union was defeated before Germany.

In his essay published in 2009*, entitled " " ("The Polish-German Parade Before Hitler on Red Square")*, Tomasz Łubieński wrote *in September*:

"The Polish-German parade in front of Hitler on Red Square would have ended incomparably worse. The Third Reich had to lose because it only had a vision of a German, or more broadly, a racist, Nordic world. It could offer other races or nations various degrees of slavery. So an alliance with Hitler would have ended in disaster for Poland."

But it is quite the opposite. Of course, the Third Reich had to lose. And thankfully so. However, this would not have meant defeat for Poland, which was allied with Germany, but rather salvation, as Łubieński writes. After all, if we had defeated the Soviet Union together with Germany and World War II had ended there, we would have found ourselves in a vassal position.

Kazimierz Czapiński vividly described how the Republic would then be "suffocated by this vast new Hitlerite empire." This is probably an exaggeration, but it would indeed be difficult to expect Poland—caught in the grip of German territories—to quickly shake off the restrictive status of "junior partner." After the war, our dependence on Germany would likely have deepened rather than loosened.

It was precisely the fact that there was still the Western Front, where the Third Reich not only had significant forces engaged, but sooner or later "had to lose" – once the Americans produced the atomic bomb – that made our situation so favorable. Łubieński is therefore mistaken when he writes that the defeat of the Third Reich would not have been in the interests of Poland, which was allied with it.

Łubieński's essay *1939. It began in September* is very characteristic. It is hard to believe that this uncompromising historical journalist, who uses very rational arguments to dispel the myth of the Warsaw Uprising, this time resorts to such phrases as: "I fear that after the inevitable collapse of Germany

empire (if it had even managed to come into being) there would have been no politician as powerful and magnanimous as Wilson to call for the resurrection of the troublesome Polish state, which – it is true – had been ill-served by history, but was also to blame for its own misfortunes. And so it failed to behave appropriately, aligning itself with Nazi Germany.

Firstly: what resurrection? After the fall of the Third Reich, there would be no need to resurrect any "troublesome Polish state." The state would exist and thrive. The strength of a state is measured by the strength of its neighbors. The weaker the neighbors, the stronger the state. So, in a situation where there was no Third Reich or Soviet Union, Poland would automatically become a regional power. Its importance and capabilities would increase significantly. Just as after the First World War, which resulted in the collapse of the partitioning powers.

“Let us imagine how the Polish cause would look in the eyes of the victorious coalition,” Łubieński continues, “if we were to find ourselves in the same camp as Hitler, even for a moment, and parade through Moscow, where memories of the times of sorrow and Polish occupation of the Kremlin have lived on for four hundred years.”

It is difficult not to smile when reading such a sentence. When I read it for the first time, I could not believe that it really came from the pen of Tomasz Łubieński, whom I admire for his books on the Warsaw Uprising. Łubieński has always rejected empty platitudes, wishful thinking, and the childish naivety with which Poles view the events of World War II—or perhaps even more broadly—international politics as such.

So let us try to respond to Łubieński and imagine “how the Polish case would have looked in the eyes of the victorious coalition if we had found ourselves in the same camp as Hitler, even for a moment.” Well, the victorious coalition would certainly have been very angry with us. Winston Churchill and Harry Truman would not be able to sleep at night, thinking about how terrible and disgusting Poland was for allying itself with Hitler.

Known for their political integrity and outright physical disgust at entering into alliances with totalitarian dictators, the British and Americans would have completely lost their good opinion of the Poles. As we know, they fought World War II not for their own national interests, but for freedom and democracy. They fought it in alliance with fellow fighters for a noble cause. Led by the likeable Uncle Joe. A well-known defender of human rights from Eastern Europe.

"How could anyone ally themselves with a man who had so much blood on his hands? Only perfidious reptiles without honor or scruples, such as the Poles, could do such a thing. We, the representatives of the Victorious Coalition, the noble Anglo-Saxons, would never have disgraced ourselves in this way. In politics, morality and honor are the most important values!" Winston Churchill would have shouted indignantly at the peace conference.

But jokes aside. Surely the British and Americans would not have been thrilled that the Poles were fighting alongside Hitler in the first phase of the war. But if we had switched sides in the second phase, they would have eaten out of our hands. That's just how it is – as everyone in the world except the Poles knows very well – that in international politics, it's power that counts.

Łubieński's argument would make sense if, after the end of World War II, we had actually received something in return for our uncompromising anti-Nazi stance. If, thanks to this stance, we had been granted independence by the "victorious coalition." Let us look at how the "Polish question appeared in the eyes of the victorious coalition" after World War II. Well, it did not appear at all.

This wonderful "victorious coalition" traded away the brave Poles, who "never for a moment found themselves in the same camp as Hitler," in Yalta without batting an eye. They gave this wonderful, heroic Poland to Stalin, without even a moment's thought for our "beautiful attitude" during the war. The fate of the weak and naive is that no one takes them into account. Poland's alleged virtue during World War II – which, like Wanda, preferred

to drown ourselves rather than marry a German – it gave us nothing. It was all completely in vain.

Let us look at Hungary and Romania, for example. Although both countries fought on the Eastern Front on Germany's side, when the Reich began to lose, they entered into secret negotiations with the Western Allies. London and Washington did not conduct these negotiations with disgust. On the contrary, the stronger Hitler's ally was, the more eagerly they encouraged him to switch sides. The greater his value to them, because he depleted the Reich's forces. In conducting negotiations with Germany's allies, the British and Americans not only did not scold anyone like a wayward schoolboy for "not knowing how to behave" (Łubieński's term) and joining forces with the Reich, but on the contrary, they were ready to offer him a lot.

The pro-Allied shift ultimately failed in Hungary due to decisive German countermeasures, but the Romanians changed sides in 1944 and even managed to fight alongside the Germans for a while. The situation was similar in Finland, which fought alongside the Reich against the Soviets between 1941 and 1944, but changed alliances after 1944 and waged a regular war against the Wehrmacht in Lapland until 1945.

"There is, in fact, a notable example," wrote Professor Jerzy Łojek, "of the situation Poland could find itself in, initially allied with Hitler, then distancing itself from the Reich, at a time when the Western coalition began to deal effective blows to Germany. It would find itself in a situation similar to that of Italy in 1943. Italy remained at war with France and Great Britain for three years. Italian troops fought alongside Adolf Hitler against the British in Africa and on the continent. Did this prevent an agreement between the new Italian government and the Allies in 1943? Is Italy's fate today worse than that of Poland? Does anyone today reproach Italy (or even Japan) for its active participation in World War II on the side of Hitler's Reich?

Italy is a prime example because, unlike the Romanians, Hungarians, and Poles—if we had gone with Hitler against the Soviets, of course—Benito Mussolini's soldiers fought not only against the Bolsheviks but also against the British, giving them a hard time in the Mediterranean, for example. Nevertheless, this did not result in Italy being wiped off the map of Europe, as Tomasz Łubieński, a pro-German Polish writer, predicted.

"We would look good," Łubieński continues in another part of *1939*, again resorting to typically Polish, emotional arguments detached from reality, "politically and morally, if Poland owed Hitler something territorially. We would have to apologize, give everything back, and then some."

At this point, it is worth asking – how would they force us to do so? I dare to put forward a thesis opposite to that of Łubieński. Not only would we not have to give anything back, but we could get even more than Hitler gave us. Let us take another look at the international situation at the time we are interested in. After five or six years of bloody struggle, World War II ends. Germany capitulates.

Euphoria erupts around the world. Victory parades are held, "our boys" from all the warring countries return home – finally, this terrible war is over! The world licks its wounds, prepares to switch to peacetime and rebuild the enormous destruction. Families mourn the dead or welcome home their sons, brothers, and husbands. And it is then that Winston Churchill and Harry Truman decide to declare war on the greatest power remaining on the European continent (France, the Soviet Union, Germany, and Italy lie in ruins).

– Why? – asks the astonished Anglo-Saxon public.

– Because those awful Poles, Churchill and Truman will reply, couldn't behave themselves and allied themselves with that thug Hitler in the early stages of the war. So now we have to force them to (as Łubieński wrote) "apologize" and "give back everything with interest."

– But what exactly should these Poles give us back? – opposition journalists relentlessly pursue the topic.

– What do you mean? Ukraine and Belarus! – the brave politicians of the victorious coalition would reply.

I think that such a response would provoke an outburst of laughter, but for both gentlemen it would end rather seriously – with immediate dismissal. They would be considered madmen.

I can assure you that the British and Americans would not have started another war in 1945 or 1946 to liberate Belarusians and Ukrainians "oppressed" by Poles. This assumption is plausible because it is not based on conjecture, but on a similar situation that actually occurred in 1945. At the peace conference, there was room for a country that had fought alongside the Third Reich in the first phase of the war. That country was the Soviet Union.

The British and Americans did not demand that Joseph Stalin "apologize" for being in the same camp as Adolf Hitler between 1939 and 1941. Nor did they demand anything else of him.
"pay back with interest." On the contrary, at the Yalta Conference, he got from them the same thing that Hitler had given him in the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, and even much more. The same would have happened to Poland if we had been left alone on the battlefield in Eastern Europe. If the British and Americans traded away Poland, with which they had allied themselves, without batting an eyelid, why would they stand up for Belarus or Ukraine?

For many years, the West not only did not hold a grudge against the Soviets for their nearly two-year alliance with the Reich, but even tried to justify it in every possible way. For example, French historians Jean Bouvier and Jean Gacon wrote in their famous monograph *Rok 1939* (The Year 1939), published in 1955 and also in the People's Republic of Poland, that due to the balance of power in Europe on the eve of the war, Stalin was right to temporarily ally himself with Adolf Hitler.

It was impossible to demand that he "commit suicide," which would have ended the confrontation between the Soviets and the Third Reich. As we can see, it was impossible to demand suicide from the Soviet Union, but it was perfectly acceptable to demand it from Poland. What is more, as we are told today, if we had behaved differently in 1939 and had not committed suicide, we would have been discredited and disgraced for all time. You must admit that this approach is not very logical.

Anyway, if our alternative scenario had come true, to whom would Poland have had to "return with interest" its territorial gains in the East after the war? To whom would it have had to give Belarus and Ukraine? To the Soviet Union? But that country would have ceased to exist long ago. Or perhaps to White Russia, which began to emerge painfully after 1945, following the return of the German occupation forces to their homeland? This is highly unlikely.

Chapter 8

The Bolsheviks in Warsaw

So far, we have considered an optimistic scenario. In my opinion, Polish participation in the German "crusade against Bolshevism" would have sealed Stalin's downfall. But what would have happened if the Republic of Poland had accepted Hitler's offer, but this had not changed the course of history and, together with our German allies, we had been defeated by the Red Army? This is very unlikely, but such a scenario must also be considered.

In such a situation, events would unfold more or less as they did in reality. It is spring 1941, and Germany and Poland are attacking the Soviet Union. At first, everything goes beautifully. Millions of Red Army soldiers surrender to us, the population welcomes us with flowers, we advance like a storm. However, as a result of Hitler's wrong decisions, we arrive too late at Moscow. We get stuck in the snow-covered endless Russian plains, and there is no longer any question of a Polish-German Blitzkrieg.

Polish tanks, cavalry, and brave infantry are useless. An exhausting, long-lasting campaign begins. The war lasts several years, and finally, in February 1943, the decisive moment arrives. Despite repeated attacks, the bloodied German and Polish divisions collapse at Stalingrad. The Axis forces are trapped in a huge cauldron and surrender. Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus and General Franciszek Kleeberg are taken prisoner. Stalin triumphs, and a great Soviet counteroffensive follows.

After this spectacular defeat, the tide turns on the Eastern Front. Things are getting worse. The Allies are forced onto the defensive and slowly retreat under pressure from the Red Army. Finally, in the winter of 1944, Soviet divisions invade Polish territory, as was the case in reality. The only difference is that they are entering a country that is now officially hostile, rather than the territory of "their allies' allies."

World War II would eventually reach Polish territory. The fate of the inhabitants of the Republic of Poland would then certainly be grim. Soviet air raids on Polish cities could be expected, and the Red Army and the NKVD would be even more ruthless towards the Polish civilian population than they actually were. There could have been massacres of civilians and mass rape of women, from infants to decrepit old women. Just as actually happened in Germany.

This would, of course, be a great tragedy, but Poland's situation would still be much better than it actually was. World War II would have reached the territories of the Second Polish Republic at the beginning of 1944, after four years of fighting. This is a huge difference compared to the actual course of events in 1939, when we found ourselves under occupation just one month after the outbreak of war.

A side note here. In reality, Soviet troops crossed the Polish border in the first days of 1944. In our alternative scenario, this would probably have happened a few months later due to fierce resistance from Polish troops, who would have fought to prevent the Bolsheviks from reaching their cities, their daughters, and their wives.

Such a late entry of the occupier into the territory of the Republic of Poland would mean that Poles would have avoided the nightmare of German occupation in 1939–1944 and Soviet occupation in 1939–1941. Instead, we would have had only Soviet occupation, which began in 1944.

Although the Red Army, after entering openly hostile Poland in 1944, would have been more brutal towards its inhabitants, it certainly would not have murdered as many as several million people, i.e. as many as died in Poland during the five-year occupation. We know that the Red Army, having entered the territories of the Reich's allies – Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Slovakia – in 1944, was very cruel (which was in its nature), but it did not murder millions of people. The terror was rather selective in nature. It was not much worse there than in Poland, which was allied with the Allies.

What's more, let's look at the Soviet occupation of Germany. After a wave of murders and rapes committed "on the march" by the invading Red Army, the situation there quickly stabilized. Somehow, the Soviets did not plow and drown the entire territory of the future GDR in a sea of blood. They did not burn the cities there, they did not murder the women, children, and elderly there. So why would they treat Poland more cruelly?

In Poland after 1944, NKVD officers also killed civilians (their greatest crime was the so-called Augustów roundup, in which they murdered at least 600 people), disarmed the Polish army that surrendered to them (the absurd Operation Tempest) and sent thousands of Polish citizens to Siberia in cattle cars. The Home Army soldiers who stood before Soviet tribunals were accused of being "fascist collaborators." For this, they were sentenced by communist "courts," shot in the back of the head, or deported to Kolyma.

For Stalin and his comrades, there was little difference between a Waffen SS soldier and a Home Army soldier. In the eyes of the Bolsheviks, both were "enemies of the people" and "counter-revolutionaries" who had to be destroyed in the name of class struggle. The former fought in the name of National Socialism, which was a system that "exploited the working masses of the cities and villages," and the latter fought in the name of "lordly" Poland, which also "exploited the working masses of the cities and villages."

It was no coincidence that Soviet propaganda accused the Polish underground state of collaborating with the Germans. The belief that Stalin – if we had fought against him during World War II alongside the Third Reich – would have been angry with us and murdered half of our nation is therefore somewhat naive.

In discussions on this topic, I have often encountered the argument that if Poland, together with Germany, had been defeated on the Eastern Front, the victorious Big Three, in shaping the new post-war order, would have treated us much worse. We might have saved several million inhabitants, Warsaw, priceless monuments and works of art, but what good would that have done if, as punishment for our bad behavior, we had been absorbed by the Soviet Union?

In the aforementioned interview from the book *Co by było, gdyby… (What if...)*, Professor Ajnenkiel said that Poland would have been turned "at best into a 20th-century Duchy of Warsaw, if not simply into the 17th republic of victorious Soviet Russia. After all, as the most loyal ally of the anti-Hitler coalition, fighting sacrificially on almost all fronts of this war, from its first to its last day, we lost half of our pre-war territory. So what would be the price of our defeat as Hitler's ally?"

Unfortunately, this argument is completely ahistorical, a mere fabrication repeated like a mantra in order to defend Józef Beck's decision of 1939. The thesis that several million Poles had to be brutally murdered so that the People's Republic of Poland could get Wrocław and Szczecin is ridiculous. There is no confirmation of this in any source material. The truth is brutal: if we had lost in the East alongside Hitler, we would have been treated the same way we were treated in reality. That is, Stalin would have taken our eastern territories and then created a satellite state on the rest of our territories. In contrast to the fanciful theory of the seventeenth republic, there are solid arguments to support this thesis.

After World War II in Europe, Stalin incorporated into Soviet territory only those lands that he had occupied six years earlier as a result of the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact. So, apart from half of Poland, these included the Baltic states, part of Romania, and a piece of Finland.

The rest of the territories that came under Soviet occupation in 1944–1945 became communist satellite states controlled by Moscow. These were the so-called communist bloc countries.

This is not the place to discuss why Stalin made this particular decision and not another. That is simply how it was. And this fate befell the countries of Central and Eastern Europe regardless of which side they fought on during World War II. If Stalin had indeed made such a distinction and punished them for their alliance with Hitler by incorporating them into the Soviet Union, the map of post-war Europe would have looked completely different from what it actually did.

It would include only two "demoludy" – the Polish People's Republic and the Czech Socialist Republic. The red empire would include the following new republics: the Slovak Soviet Socialist Republic, the Hungarian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Romanian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Bulgarian Soviet Socialist Republic, and, of course, the East German Soviet Socialist Republic.

As we know, nothing of the sort happened. Nor would the Polish Soviet Socialist Republic have been created as punishment for the fact that the unruly Poles, instead of politely allowing themselves to be murdered, fought alongside the Germans. For Stalin, it made no difference whether someone fought against or on Hitler's side.

The belief that the Soviet dictator gave us the People's Republic of Poland as a reward for dying so beautifully, by the millions, in the fight against Hitler for six years is, to put it mildly, extremely naive. It can only result from patriotic blindness or ignorance of Stalin's psyche and the decision-making mechanisms of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet dictator was not guided by sentiment in politics. This is painful for our overly inflated national ego and our historical sensitivity, but

The "disgusting collaborators" from Romania and Slovakia, as well as the Czechs, whom we despise so much, who surrendered without firing a single shot, ended up just like the heroic Poles, who bled themselves dry for six years in a hopeless war in order to please the world and not disgrace themselves by collaborating with the Reich. We were not treated any better, and they were not treated any worse. In both cases, the communists used the same strategy and the same methods.

What is more, Germans from the Soviet occupation zone were treated in the same way as we were. Just as in occupied Poland, the NKVD created a local communist party and local security services, through which it controlled this formally "sovereign" country. If the system in East Germany was slightly more repressive than in Poland, it was not because Stalin wanted to punish East Germans for Hitler. Rather, it was due to certain specific characteristics of the German nation.

Another argument raised by defenders of the last head of diplomacy of the Second Polish Republic is the thesis that Stalin, punishing us for the Ribbentrop–Beck Pact, would not have given us

the “Recovered Territories” (I deliberately put this idiotic communist term in quotation marks). As a result, not only would Poland have become red after the war, but it would also have been a rump state squeezed between East Germany and Bolshevik Russia. A communist Congress Kingdom without Vilnius and Lviv, but also without Szczecin and Wrocław.

“It is unclear which version of events would have been less tragic for Poland: the ultimate victory of the Reich or that of the anti-German coalition. What would the situation have been like if Poland had been Germany's defeated ally? It would probably have been reduced to a few central provinces, something like a new Duchy of Warsaw," said Professor Stanisław Żerko in an interview with Gazeta Wyborcza.

I am afraid that the reality was much less romantic. Szczecin, Wrocław, and Olsztyn were not gifts to the brave Poles from their good uncle Stalin, who was moved by their beautiful heroic attitude during the war. Nor were they a reward for the Warsaw Uprising, as such ideas also appeared in our unrealistic, ultra-patriotic historiography.

The eastern provinces of the Reich were incorporated into the People's Republic of Poland for completely different reasons. First of all, Poland was sold to the Soviets at the Big Three conference before it was even decided what to do with Germany. At that time, Stalin could not be sure whether he would get his share of the Third Reich and whether he would be able to create a communist satellite state on its territory. The transfer of Poland to his control – which our “allies” had promised him many times – was already sealed. Stalin could therefore assume that the western border of the People’s Republic of Poland would be the western border of the entire Soviet bloc after the war. It was therefore obvious that it had to be moved as far as possible. In view of his expansionist plans, this was of considerable importance. It is easier to send tanks to Paris and Lisbon when the starting point is Szczecin rather than Poznań.

Secondly, it was about giving Poles some compensation for taking away their eastern territories. Again, however, it was not about sentiment, but about calculation. Thanks to the incorporation of the "Recovered Territories" into the People's Republic of Poland, Poland was more easily Sovietized. It can be assumed that public resistance to the loss of Vilnius and Lviv and the new occupation after 1945 was somewhat less than it would have been if Poland had not only had the communist system imposed on it, but had also been reduced to a size not much larger than the Congress Kingdom.

Thirdly, these "Recovered Territories" caused Poles to turn away from the East and focus all their attention on the West. Stalin understood very well that Poland – regardless of its political system – possessing the eastern provinces of the Reich would be doomed to a long conflict with Germany. All of its energy would have to focus on the fight against German "revanchism," which would seek to take back these territories.

When Poles are threatened by German expansion, Stalin reasoned, it is only natural that they will seek protection and a guarantor of their borders in Moscow. Only the Soviets could benefit from such German-Polish antagonism. It was, in fact, an extremely effective tactic. It was no coincidence that many émigré activists – staunch anti-communists in their everyday lives – declared that on the issue of the border on the Oder and Lusatian Neisse rivers
“fully sympathized with the country.”

How many times have people from the communist regime explained and continue to explain that they supported the Polish People's Republic precisely out of fear of "Ehrenreich's revanchism," from which only an alliance with the Soviet Union could defend Poland. Indeed, when one has to maintain Szczecin and Wrocław, who would even think about regaining Lviv and Vilnius? By giving the Polish People's Republic the "Recovered Territories," Stalin permanently diverted the attention of Poles from their eastern lands, which the Soviet colossus could then quietly digest.

So perhaps this will be upsetting to readers who enjoy our "beautiful failures," but during World War II, we could have easily fought on Hitler's side. We could have demolished half of the Soviet Union, killed a million Red Army soldiers, and blown up three thousand monuments to Joseph Stalin. And after the war, we would have been treated the same way we were treated in reality.

And vice versa. We could fight with the Germans even more decisively and uncompromisingly. Extend the September campaign until December, blow up ten times more German barracks, trains, and restaurants, demolish all large cities, provoking crazy uprisings in them, and organize the "Storm" operation in every forest. In this hopeless struggle, we could have lost not a few million citizens, but twenty million, for example. And even then, we would not have regained our independence.

Chapter 9

Would Stalin have waited for the verdict?

There is another scenario that should be considered. It was presented by journalist Piotr Skwieciński in the weekly magazine Uważam Rze. According to him, if Poland had signed a pact with Hitler, it could very quickly have found itself in serious trouble. While the Führer would have thrown his armored divisions at France, Stalin would have stepped in. Instead of waiting for the Germans and Poles to "execute him" in the second phase of the war, he would have attacked the Republic himself, taking advantage of the fact that the Wehrmacht was busy in the West.

Regular units of the Red Army would cross the border of the Republic of Poland, and behind our lines, local communists would start an anti-Polish uprising. "The Polish army would not be crushed by the Russians, as it was in reality in its confrontation with the Germans," writes Skwieciński. "It would fight in compact formations, persistently, but it would be pushed westward. I think that two or three weeks after the start of the war, Vilnius, and perhaps even Lviv, would be in real danger."

According to Piotr Skwieciński, Germany would obviously come to the rescue, but this would significantly weaken Poland's position vis-à-vis the Reich, and Poland would become its permanent supplicant. Our army would be "ravaged," and "mass rebellions in the Eastern Borderlands—even if suppressed—would show the world, and thus Germany, the internal weakness of the Polish state." Skwieciński's article is one of the most interesting and, at the same time, one of the few substantive and competent, rather than emotional, voices in the discussion on Poland's choices in 1939. It deserves serious consideration.

Michał Łubieński, director of Józef Beck's office, had already spoken about this possibility in the 1930s. In his opinion, "a situation could arise in which Poland, hitherto neutral, would fight militarily against the Red Army in defense of its neutrality, while at the same time fighting on the German-French front." However, it seems that such a scenario, as presented now by Piotr Skwieciński, was very unlikely. An attack by the Soviet Union on the Republic of Poland, which was protecting the German rear, would almost certainly not have taken place.

Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939 was only possible because he had previously concluded the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact. However, this also worked the other way around. All Soviet aggression in Eastern Europe in 1939–1940 was possible thanks to this political agreement. It was in a secret protocol to this pact that the two totalitarian giants divided the eastern part of the continent into their spheres of influence. And yet, in the situation we are discussing, there would have been no Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. There would have been a Ribbentrop-Beck Pact.

Stalin's most important trait – which ensured him many successes – was caution. There is no doubt that the Soviet dictator invaded Europe in 1939 with his motley crew called an army only because he had Germany's guaranteed support. He was certain that the Third Reich would not turn against him.

For the same reason, the countries that fell victim to its aggression – apart from the heroic Finns – did not even resist the Soviets. Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, and Romania did not take up arms in 1940 because they knew that they could not count on the help of the only two powerful countries in Central and Eastern Europe that could possibly defend them against the threat from the East.

So Germany (the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact) and Poland (which had just ceased to exist). They decided that in this hopeless strategic situation, fighting would only result in unnecessary military losses.

These countries might have behaved quite differently if the Soviet Union had acted against the bloc of the Republic of Poland and the Reich in the same year, 1940. Not only did we have excellent relations with Romania, but we were also bound by a mutual assistance pact in the event of Soviet aggression. And this was not an exotic paper alliance – such as the one Beck concluded with the French and British – but a real alliance between countries whose fates were closely intertwined. The destruction of Poland by the Soviets posed a mortal danger to Romania. Conversely, the destruction of Romania by the Soviets posed a mortal danger to Poland.

It can therefore be assumed with a high degree of probability that Romania would have honored its alliance commitments and, if the Soviets had attacked Poland in 1940, would have entered the war, striking the Red Army from the southeast. Latvia and Estonia, and perhaps even Lithuania, which was not particularly fond of Poland, could have made a similar assumption. One glance at the map was enough to see that the Soviet occupation of Poland would automatically mean the suffocation and destruction of all three Baltic states. It is also difficult to predict how Hungary would have behaved in such a situation. The country not only maintained excellent relations with Poland, but was also aware of the Soviet threat and, as a result, was very anti-communist.

When considering the idea of attacking Poland, Stalin would have had to take into account that such a war would quickly turn into a war with the whole of Central and Eastern Europe, which would not want to let the Bolshevik plague in. The Red Army would have had to fight a broad coalition of states led by the Republic of Poland. Add to this the fact that such a coalition would soon be joined by German divisions – Prussia is not far from the Polish-Soviet border – and the whole affair could have had very serious consequences for the Soviets. Knowing Stalin, it is safe to say that he would not have gotten himself into such a mess.

Today, we are well aware of the Soviet dictator's plans from the 1920s and 1930s and his calculations regarding the course of events. Dreaming of a global revolution, Stalin intended to adopt a wait-and-see attitude. The Axis powers and Western democracies were to bleed themselves dry and destroy each other in a war lasting several years, and only then would the Red Army enter the arena. It was to roll over devastated Europe like a steamroller and bring the fruits of revolution on the tracks of its tanks. The Soviet "paradise" would extend as far as Lisbon.

As early as 1925, Stalin said: "If war breaks out, we cannot sit idly by, but we will be the last to join it. And we will do so in order to tip the scales with decisive weight—weight that could tip them in our favor."

After the outbreak of World War II, following Germany's attack on Poland, Stalin stated: "We have nothing against them [the Third Reich, France, and Great Britain] fighting each other and weakening each other. It would be good if Germany were to undermine the position of the richer capitalist countries, especially England. Hitler, without understanding or wanting it, is undermining and destabilizing the capitalist system. We can maneuver, push one side against the other, so that they fight each other better."

The Soviet dictator did not treat the conclusion of the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact and the attack on Poland as a serious entry into the world war – which was to be fought in the West between the Axis and the Western Allies – but as a step that was to become a catalyst for that war. A step that would prompt Hitler to go to war. Stalin planned that after occupying half of Poland, the Baltic states, Bessarabia, and Finland (the latter of which he failed to achieve), he would wait for developments on the Western Front. He would wait until the Europeans had fought each other to a standstill, and then, in the final act of the war, he would be able to push his tanks towards Portugal without fear.

Poland's accession to the Anti-Comintern Pact would not have changed these plans and calculations. Stalin would still have planned to invade Europe, but not at the beginning of Germany's war.

with the Western powers, but at its end. *Today* we know that France defended itself for only six weeks and collapsed like a house of cards under Hitler's attack. However, it came as a shock to the whole of Europe at the time, including the Third Reich. If, on May 9, 1940, the day before the attack, someone had told the German generals that by mid-June it would all be over and they would be sipping wine in the cafes of Montmartre in full uniform and decorated with medals, they would have thought he was crazy.

And these are not mere speculations. From preserved documents, memoirs, and accounts, we know that the Germans also expected a protracted conflict in Western Europe. France had the largest land army on the continent, surpassing its German opponent in terms of the number of tanks and artillery pieces, and was still basking in the glory of its 1918 victory. Add to that the British Expeditionary Force, which had just landed on the continent, and it seemed that this time the Germans would have a very tough nut to crack. The whole of Europe expected this war to last a long time.

We know that the rapid collapse of France shocked not only the French and British, who had to flee through Dunkirk, but also Adolf Hitler. However, the most shocked of all was... Joseph Stalin. Soviet documents reveal that he was certain that the clash between the Anglo-French bloc and Germany would be a long, protracted, and bloody war, after which he would enter the battlefield to conquer Europe. When France signed an armistice with Germany on June 22, 1940, Stalin was terrified. He realized that he was now alone with Hitler in Europe...

There is therefore no reason to believe that if Poland had accepted Hitler's offer, his reasoning would have taken a different course. After the German attack on France, Stalin, instead of hastily attacking Poland, would have rubbed his hands together and calmly waited for both sides to exhaust themselves and bleed each other dry, just as they had done during World War I. Then, of course, events would have begun to unfold rapidly. Before Stalin realized what was happening, the red banner with the black broken cross would already be flying over Versailles. The Soviet Union would therefore have had no chance to attack Poland before the fall of France. It simply would not have had time.

Such a campaign cannot be prepared in a week or two. So, by the time the Bolsheviks got ready to act, German divisions would have long been mobilized and ready to march eastward. Therefore, the Soviet attack on Poland – which in 1940 secured the German rear during the campaign against France – would almost certainly not have taken place.

However, reliability dictates that we consider every scenario. So let us imagine that in 1940, a Polish-Soviet war did indeed break out. Well, I am afraid that it would not have ended in disaster for Poland. On the contrary, we would have given the Reds a hard time. Just as we did once before in 1920. Similar simulations have already been carried out by military historians, and the Red Army fared terribly in them, while the Polish Army did quite well.

These expert opinions were not based on theoretical considerations on paper, but on an assessment of reality. That is, a thorough analysis of the war with Finland, which the Red Army fought in 1939–1940, and the few situations in which the Polish Army resisted the Bolsheviks after September 17.

The picture that emerges from these analyses is devastating for the Red Army. It is difficult to even call this entity an army. It was rather a huge mass of confused, terrified men, driven forward – often after being plied with vodka – by amateurs playing the role of commanders. In the event of any serious combat contact with the Poles after September 17, the Red Army soldiers simply scattered without putting up a fight. Unless, of course, they had a huge numerical advantage.

The morale of the Red Army soldiers was terrible; they had no desire to fight in the name of the hated Soviet regime that oppressed them. Although the Polish Army did not stand a chance of defeating two enemies, it happened that soldiers

Red Army soldiers defected to our side! This happened, among other places, in the vicinity of Puchowa Góra, where General Adam Epler's hastily organized group defeated Colonel Orlov's stronger 143rd Rifle Division.

Many prisoners were enlisted into the Polish Army at their own request and, as the commander recalled,

"fought to the end, they were loyal and devoted comrades." Since these people, in order to fight "hated commissars," defected to the Polish side in such a hopeless situation as in September 1939, what would have happened if a regular war between the Republic of Poland and the Soviets had actually broken out? A war fought alone, without German support for the Soviets. If Warsaw had issued appropriate anti-communist and national liberation proclamations, probably half of the Red Army would have joined us.

The fact that the Soviet army was useless in real combat conditions is confirmed by an analysis of the Soviet-Finnish war at the turn of 1939 and 1940, known as the Winter War. The Soviet command in this campaign had little to do with the art of war. It was simply a methodical slaughter of starving, freezing soldiers, driven in droves towards the machine guns of the Red Army. Successive senseless frontal attacks collapsed on Finnish fortifications, in front of which piles of Bolshevik corpses were piling up. The tactics of the Red commanders seemed to boil down to depriving the enemy of ammunition in this way. These commanders counted on having more men than the Finns had bullets.

Meanwhile, the brave Finns' fingers were swelling from constantly pulling the trigger and killing more and more Soviets rushing towards their positions. For example, sniper Simo Häyhä – nicknamed White Death – shot over 700 enemy soldiers himself. To this day, no one has any idea how many people Soviet generals lost in this campaign. Their losses were at least several times higher than those of their opponents. This balance was even higher in the first months of the German-Soviet war.

The Red Army was poorly commanded and poorly organized. It lacked literally everything. Equipment, ammunition, weapons, uniforms, food, not to mention toilet paper and chewing tobacco. This situation reflected the total chaos that prevailed throughout the Soviet Union in the 1930s. It was a state that existed only on paper. In reality, it was in complete ruin. The Red Army, which won World War II, was yet to be created. It was not created by Stalin, but by Hitler, who brutally murdered prisoners of war, thus forcing these people to fight for a cause they hated.

Let me remind you what I wrote in chapter three: the Polish Army was created precisely to fight the Soviets, and it would be most dangerous for the army of that country. It can therefore be assumed that it would have fared much better in a conflict with its eastern neighbor than it did – or rather did not do – with its western neighbor in September 1939.

Everything seems to indicate that not only – as Piotr Skwieciński wrote , the Red Army, fighting alone against the Polish Army, would not be able to threaten Lviv and Vilnius, but should rather worry about Kiev, because Minsk, located near the border, would probably fall into Polish hands in the first days of the campaign. If Romania, which had considerable potential in 1939, had also entered the fray, the campaign could have taken a very interesting turn.

"It wasn't really an army, but rather a motley crew," said Professor Paweł Wieczorkiewicz about the Red Army of 1939. "Dressed in incomplete uniforms, with rifles on strings. This was not a sign of low Soviet manufacturing standards, but rather of the total organizational chaos reigning in the Red Army. One of its divisions even went to the front in civilian clothes. The army was also severely depleted by Stalin's purge, which decimated its officer corps. There was no one to command, no one knew how to command. Officers were completely lost in any difficult situation. The Bolshevik soldiers also did not want to fight and fought very poorly. If we had started the war in 1939 only against the Soviets – as the Finnish experience also indicates – without much trouble

we would have stopped this aggression. On September 17, we would probably have been 150, or maybe even 200 kilometers east of our border. Such a war would have been fought on Soviet territory.

In 1939, the Bolsheviks could indeed have destroyed and carved up Poland, then brutally Sovietized it, exterminating its pro-independence elites. In other words, they could have implemented the scenario of the Polish People's Republic six years earlier. But, paradoxically, this could have happened not if a Polish-Soviet war had broken out, in which we would have managed to cope, but if a Polish-Soviet alliance had been concluded.

Here is an excerpt from an interesting and very accurate analysis prepared in April 1939 by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "For European civilized countries bordering Russia, it is more dangerous as an ally than as an enemy, because, being powerless as the latter, it has a dangerous influence, as experience teaches us, on the internal relations of friendly countries."

On the eve of World War II, the French and British strongly urged us to form such an alliance. However, Józef Beck firmly opposed this idea, which involved allowing the Red Army to pass through Polish territory, for which he deserves great praise. During talks in Moscow with envoys from Paris and London, Kliment Voroshilov demanded... the creation of two corridors, through the Vilnius region and Eastern Galicia, through which the Red Army would pass. Of course, agreeing to such a thing would have meant the end of Poland. Nevertheless, because of the rejection of this offer, Beck was vilified by Marxist historiography for half a century, and recently the Russians have also been attacking him for it.

Here is an example in a light version. Olgierd Terlecki, the communist-era biographer of the last foreign minister of the Second Polish Republic, believed that by rejecting the possibility of concluding an anti-German pact with the Soviets, Beck “missed the greatest opportunity of his life, his historical career, and his politics, not knowing, not even suspecting, that he was recklessly passing over a critical point in the history of not only Poland.”

Here is an example of the hard version. An excerpt from the book *Pakt Piłsudski–Hitler (The Piłsudski–Hitler Pact)* by Karol Lapter, a pre-war activist of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine, published in Warsaw in 1963: “There was an alternative. It was only class hatred of the USSR [as in the original] on the part of the ruling camp and its bourgeois opposition, only short-sightedness and fear of their own nation that pushed Piłsudski and Beck to cooperate with the Germans. Concealing this alternative is the main method by which the reactionary school of history attempts – objectively – to justify the Sanacja regime and maintain old grudges and complexes in the backward part of society. Alongside this politically reactionary and scientifically false school of historiography, there is a Marxist school in Poland that opposes it.”

So let us not "conceal" this alternative. Indeed, Beck could have succumbed to pressure, followed the advice of Great Britain and France, and agreed to allow the Red Army to march through Poland to the West. However, this would have been his last decision and probably the last decision in the history of Poland. Yalta would have come to pass, only in 1939. The Red Army never retreated from territory it had once occupied. Immediately after entering Poland, the Soviets would have crushed us from within, against which we would have been unable to defend ourselves. They would have relied, of course, on their agents, i.e., spy and sabotage networks operating under the code names KPZU, KPZB, and the remnants of the KPP network.

There would have been a genocide of Poles, a Katyn on a gigantic scale. The Polish elite—probably led by Józef Beck—would have ended up with a bullet in the back of their heads in mass graves, and other
“counterrevolutionary elements” would end up in Kolyma. Which would have amounted to the same thing, because the average life expectancy in those terrible death camps, known as the ice Auschwitz, was a few months. The remnants of Poland (after cutting off half of its territory located behind the Curzon Line) would be subjected to brutal Sovietization and turned into the People’s Republic of Poland.

Marshal Piłsudski's Poland regarded the presence of Soviet troops in Poland as allies or their march as the most dangerous thing for our country. The army

Soviet occupation of Poland would aim to transform Poland into one of the Soviet republics, wrote Władysław Studnicki on the eve of World War II. “When the Russian-Soviet army occupies the right bank of the Vistula and our eastern territories, where there are so many elements on which it can rely, in order to provide military assistance, then if not the annexation of the whole of Poland to Soviet Russia, then all the territories beyond the San and Bug rivers will become more than likely.”

General Sikorski, who himself concluded a pact with the Soviets in 1941, wrote a few years earlier: As before, a global revolution is currently underway, spearheaded and primarily driven by the red army of workers and peasants. As in the past, Soviet Russia, in accordance with the wishes of the Comintern, was to serve as the operational base for a great offensive against bourgeois states. The Soviet government's military doctrine, which is thoroughly imbued with the theory of communist revolution, plays a dominant role in the plans of the Red Command, which intends to paralyze the enemy's forces with the help of foreign communist parties. Its goal would be to liberate the international proletariat, and its area of operation would be the whole world.

The consequences of voluntarily letting such a guest into one's home would be so obvious that there is probably no point in writing about it anymore. Finally, let us quote a characteristic scene that took place in Belweder Palace in early April 1935, shortly before Józef Piłsudski's death. The Marshal received British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden there.

The elegant Englishman was very unhappy that Poland had torpedoed the so-called Eastern Pact, an alliance aimed at curbing Germany, which would have included Poland and the Soviet Union, among others. It was precisely because of attempts to involve the Bolsheviks in this agreement that the Republic of Poland, fearing for its independence, decisively rejected the project. When Eden mentioned that he had met Stalin in Moscow, Piłsudski said: "I congratulate you. When I see his portrait, I think I see a robber."

Both men began to laugh. However, while there was a note of concern in the Marshal's voice, Eden simply treated the words as a good joke.

Chapter 10

Would that be appropriate?

Adolf Hitler was one of the greatest criminals in world history. To this day, he is treated as the archetype of evil, the devil in human form. The Third Reich, led by him, committed crimes on a massive scale. Millions of people fell victim to it, including European Jews suffocated in gas chambers. This raises the question of whether forming an alliance with such a "partner" would not compromise Poland forever.

This is the opinion of most historians and journalists – regardless of their political sympathies – who have written about this possibility. For example, Tomasz Łubieński, attempting in 2009 to answer the question of whether, seventy years earlier, Poland should have “fought or not fought” the Third Reich, wrote: “An alliance with Hitler would have ended not only in defeat for Poland, but also in the shame of complicity in the fight against the entire European civilization, to which Poles felt they belonged. Thank God, this alliance is nothing more than a perverse, alternative historical fiction.”

Let me repeat: Łubieński is a journalist known for his extremely sober assessment of the Warsaw Uprising, who, when evaluating this uprising, rejected emotional arguments in favor of sober thinking and hard logic. This time, however, he resorts to emotions. "Disgrace," "perversion"— there are many more words like these in Łubieński's essay *1939. It began in September*. This shows how delicate and extremely sensitive a matter we are touching upon when considering the possibility of an alliance with Germany.

Naturally, an alliance with Hitler would be very unpleasant. Difficult and morally questionable. However, we are discussing a matter that falls within the realm of politics, which, as Jerzy Giedroyc wrote, is the most immoral sphere of human activity. What I am about to write may be shocking to many Poles: the task of the state authorities is not to defend
"national honor," as Beck believed, state authorities are not required to be impeccably clean, righteous, virtuous, and decent. State authorities are to fight for the national interest. They are to do everything in their power to ensure the security of their country and its citizens.

Other European nations understand this very well, especially the Germans and the French, and particularly the British. The Poles, however, have a poor understanding of this. Once again, I will quote Winston Churchill, whose words became the motto of this book: “The Poles have all the qualities except political sense.” It was British diplomats who were most surprised by Beck when, in 1939, he accepted their offer of an alliance and decided to confront the Third Reich. They openly admitted that they would never have done anything so reckless.

So let it be that an alliance with the Third Reich would be a disgrace for us. Please forgive me, but the "disgrace" of Poland by Colonel Józef Beck and Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz seems to me a small price to pay for saving the homeland from the devastating Soviet-German invasion, enormous losses in population, the murder of the elite, the devastation of the country, the loss of half of its territory and independence for half a century. It was better to be "disgraced" than to expose the nation and the state to all of this.

In reality, however, it seems that this "disgrace" would not have been as great as our patriotically correct historians and publicists – I think this term, coined for the purposes of this book, accurately reflects the essence of the attitude in question – would have us believe. Let us remember that during World War II, Hitler was not alone. He had allies.

Italy, Japan, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Finland, Croatia, and France, among others. Spain, Ireland, and Sweden maintained a neutral stance toward the Reich for several years. Between 1939 and 1941, Hitler's ally was the Soviet Union.

Alongside the Germans on the Eastern Front, there were also Latvians, Estonians, Ukrainians, Russians, Georgians, Azerbaijanis, Cossacks, Turkmen, Spaniards, Belgians, Dutch, Norwegians, Danes, and representatives of a dozen other nations. To this list must be added the Czechs, so despised by the Poles, who yielded to Hitler, surrendered without firing a shot, and calmly survived the entire war, making considerable concessions.

Some of these countries not only allied themselves with Hitler tactically, as Poland should have done, but also ideologically. And what happened? Nothing. Somehow, they are not "disgraced for all time." They are not pariahs of the international community today. On the contrary, they function quite normally within it. They belong to the UN, UNESCO, NATO, the EU, the Council of Europe, and dozens of other reputable organizations.

They are not subject to international ostracism. They do not pay compensation to anyone. No one reproaches them for their "dirty alliance" with Adolf Hitler. What is more, even the Germans themselves are less and less reproached for this. If any nation is currently being pilloried for its alleged sins during World War II, it is... the Poles.

The opinion of Marek Kornat, an expert on diplomacy in the Second Polish Republic, is characteristic. According to him, "if Poland had stood alongside the Third Reich, the Polish nation would be a different nation today, with a different psychology, a nation burdened with guilt, weighed down by the traumatic experience of participating in a bad cause, which in our times – in a period of growing importance of history in the life of societies – would not allow us to look at our own past with a feeling of justified satisfaction. Polish-Russian reconciliation today, so desirable and at the same time so difficult, would probably be impossible."

As you can see, the historian strikes a high note. There is a lot of emotion in this, but much less sense. It is really difficult to understand why it would be more traumatic for the nation to have formed an alliance with an unpleasant partner for a few years than to have had two occupiers brutally murder several million people, including many women and children, and deport hundreds of thousands more. "Look at your own past with a sense of justified satisfaction"? I feel no satisfaction whatsoever about this.

However, the most interesting part is the last passage. According to Professor Kornat, if we had joined Hitler in his campaign against the Soviets, Polish-Russian reconciliation would be impossible today. Well, it seems that we live in different realities. To my knowledge, although we fought bravely against the Germans throughout the war and collaborated with the Soviets after 1941, our current relations with the Russians are nothing short of disastrous. On the other hand, relations between Moscow and Berlin are flourishing, and Russian-German reconciliation took place long ago. So I guess it doesn't depend on the attitude during World War II after all.

Arguments about the disgrace that an alliance with the Third Reich would have been for the Republic of Poland are completely detached from historical reality. They are the result of emotion rather than calm analysis and reflection. Unfortunately, this gives the impression that the people putting forward these arguments believe in the infantile Western view of World War II, according to which the conflict was a clash between good and evil. Good was represented by Western democracies and their allies, and evil by Germany and its allies.

So let me ask a shy question – wasn't the Soviet Union involved in this war? We are talking about a regime that was much more totalitarian and genocidal than the Third Reich. A regime led by Joseph Stalin, a mass murderer who was an unrivaled master for Hitler. It was with this regime that Western societies democratic: the British, the Americans, the Free the French,

Canadians, New Zealanders, Australians, Norwegians, as well as Yugoslavs, Chinese, South American nations, etc.

And somehow, the inhabitants of these countries have no problem with the fact that, to quote Marek Kornat, they "took part in a bad cause." Despite their alliance with Stalin, "they also look back on their own past with a sense of justified satisfaction." If someone tried to say today in London or Washington that the alliance with Stalin was immoral and stained the honor of both nations forever, they would be considered insane. Of course, Bolshevism was nasty, they would hear, but it was necessary to ally with it in order to win World War II and defeat Hitler.

I have the same view on our tragic choices in 1939. Only the opposite. Of course, Hitlerism was nasty, but it was necessary to ally with it in order to win World War II and avoid political catastrophe and the slaughter of our citizens. The last great global conflict was a conflict of "dirty alliances." In a situation where Hitler and Stalin stood on opposite sides of the barricade, no country involved in the war could remain "clean." Each would have to ally itself with one of the genocidal regimes.

And here we come to the most sensitive issue. Poland, which fought in the anti-German coalition throughout the war, did not remain virtuous either. We too – from the signing of the Sikorski-Mayski Agreement on July 30, 1941, until April 26, 1943, when the Soviets broke off diplomatic relations with the Polish government in London – were Stalin's allies. Moreover, even after April 1943, we continued to cooperate with this totalitarian state. One example of this is the insane Operation Tempest.

The enormous emotions evoked today in Poland by the statement that in 1939 it was necessary to ally with Hitler stem primarily from the memory of the crimes he later committed against the Polish people. When Poles hear such a statement, they immediately think of Auschwitz and Palmiry, roundups on the streets of Warsaw, and the pacification of villages in the Zamość region. This approach is completely understandable, but if we put our emotions aside and think about it for a moment, we can see that it makes no sense whatsoever. After all, we are talking about forming an alliance with Hitler in 1939, before he had done any harm to Poles.

He already wrote about this in his essay *September 1939. Alternative considerations* Grzegorz Górski: "Although our view of Hitler is largely determined by his later behavior and actions, adopting such a point of view for his actions in the period we are interested in simply distorts reality, determining our view of each of his initiatives towards Poland through the prism of the later Polish catastrophe."

Today, we know that Hitler killed several million citizens of the Republic of Poland. But Józef Beck and his colleagues, who were considering the Führer's offer of an alliance, could not have known this. Moreover, by allying themselves with him, rather than joining the camp of his enemies, they could have prevented the German crimes against Poles committed between September 1939 and May 1945.

Who was Adolf Hitler in the spring of 1939, when he was supposed to become Poland's ally? A mass murderer, arsonist of the world and – as it is now fashionable to say – the architect of the Holocaust? No, he was a European leader with whom all other leaders of the continent, except Joseph Stalin, met and maintained regular contact. Just a few months earlier, in September 1938, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier, and Italian leader Benito Mussolini had held talks with him at a major diplomatic conference.

Hitler, of course, already seemed like a nasty piece of work back then. He locked up his political opponents, ordered the elimination of the leaders of a rival faction within the NSDAP (not that there is any reason to mourn them, as they were just as much thugs as Hitler, and it is frightening to think what they might have done had they lived to see the war), and, of course, he was a terrible anti-Semite.

His militants smashed windows in Jewish shops and sometimes beat Jews in the streets. However, none of this exceeded the "norms" prevailing in Europe at the time. The victims of Nazism numbered in the thousands, if not hundreds.

Let us be honest. In the 1930s, Hitler's anti-Semitism did not make him particularly unpopular with Poles. Especially since he treated them very correctly, even friendly. I will write more about this in the following chapters, but for now I will only say that he was the most favorable leader of post-war Germany towards the Republic of Poland.

I will repeat once again – supporters of the thesis that the conclusion of an alliance with Germany in the spring of 1939
"would be collaboration with a criminal who murdered several million Poles," seem to overlook the fact that the opposite would be true. Thanks to such a decision, there would be a good chance that this criminal would not murder those millions of Poles. That seems to be the fundamental difference. An alliance with Hitler would therefore not be a marriage of love, but one of convenience. It would not be an alliance entered into with a smile, but with gritted teeth.

"My generation looks at the events before the war from the perspective of 1941 or 1943," said Professor Paweł Wieczorkiewicz. "From the perspective of the cruel German policy later practiced in Poland. It seems unthinkable that we could have become allies of the Third Reich. However, it should be remembered that at that time, no European politician considered it so terrible. All leaders, even those of left-wing origin, talked to Hitler in political salons. At that time, there was no mention of German crimes on a larger scale, unlike the mass genocide in the Soviet Union."

Adolf Hitler did not reveal his criminal face until September 1939, after the outbreak of World War II, when he began his anti-Polish repressions. Six months earlier, Józef Beck and Edward Śmigły-Rydz, rejecting the Third Reich's offer, did not, as their current apologists claim, defend "humanitarian values" or "European civilization," nor did they reject
"the devil's temptation." The devil was yet to appear. Beck simply rejected a simple offer of a wartime alliance. Today, his defenders argue post factum that our minister preferred to sacrifice the country rather than enter into a "compromising alliance with a mass murderer" and "Europe's greatest tyrant."

Meanwhile, Beck had a choice: to join the world war either in alliance with Germany or with Great Britain and France. He considered the matter and decided on the latter. However, he did so not for moral reasons, as his apologists claim, but for political ones. He simply misjudged the situation.

What is more, Beck held the Führer in high regard. “As long as Hitler doesn’t screw up, everything will be fine,” he told his secretary Paweł Starzeński in the summer of 1937. And our foreign minister did not change this view until almost the very end. Until September 1939, he believed that Hitler was a reasonable politician who was friendly towards Poland, and that the deterioration of relations with Berlin was the fault of Ribbentrop, who was anti-Polish.

On May 27, 1939, Beck discussed the cooling of Polish-German relations with Carl Jakob Burckhardt, the High Commissioner of the League of Nations in the Free City of Gdańsk. He asked him to seek an audience with Hitler and personally repeat what Beck had to say to him. The reason, as the Swiss diplomat wrote, was "a lack of trust in Mr. von Ribbentrop."
"I am convinced that if Mr. von Ribbentrop had honestly informed the German Chancellor about what I told him, today's situation could have been avoided. I made proposals that could have set the stage for future negotiations. But he does not listen to what is said to him and reports the matter in a biased manner. [During the meeting with Hitler] in Obersalzberg, it was quite the opposite, everything was clearly specified," said the Polish foreign minister.

I now have an exercise for you that will show quite clearly how unreasonably and emotionally Poles treat World War II. And how unequally both criminal totalitarian regimes are treated in our country. Try telling someone that in 1939, the Republic of Poland should have made a pact with Hitler. When you hear their response, ask the same person how they feel about the Sikorski–Mayski Pact of July 1941.

I assume that the conversation will go something like this:

– In 1939, we should have joined Hitler in his invasion of the Soviet Union.

– What nonsense, to ally ourselves with a criminal who had the blood of so many people on his hands! The Polish nation would never have done such a thing! It would have been an affront to our national pride.

– And what do you think about the Polish-Soviet pact of 1941?

– What do you mean? What a question! It was a very wise decision by our statesman, General Sikorski.

So let me say it again. By signing a pact with Hitler in 1939, Beck would have allied himself with a man who had not committed any crimes against Poles or any major crimes in general. He was also a leader who was friendly towards the Republic of Poland. Let us take a rough look at the balance sheet of the Soviet Union on July 30, 1941, when General Sikorski signed an alliance with Joseph Stalin.

1917 – a bloody coup.

1917–1921 – war communism, the terrible terror of civil war, the extermination of millions of people deemed “class enemies,” including many Poles.

1919–1921 – invasion of Poland, during which the Bolshevik army commits war crimes on a large scale. Polish civilians are murdered and women are raped.

1921–1930 – the last enemies of the people are finished off, the Gulag Archipelago, the largest network of concentration camps in the world, is created. Thousands of Poles are sent there.

1930–1933 – genocidal collectivization. The Great Famine in Ukraine. Several million dead. Among them were also local Poles.

1932–1939 – genocidal industrialization.

1937 – the great purge. Terror reaches its peak. Hundreds of thousands of people are exterminated. Millions are sent to labor camps.

1937 – NKVD's "Polish operation." Over 100,000 Soviet Poles are murdered. Thousands more are sent to the steppes of Kazakhstan.

1921–1939 – Soviet sabotage groups, red terrorists, and criminal networks paid by Moscow and seeking to destroy the Polish state (the Communist Party of Poland, the Communist Party of Western Ukraine, and the Communist Party of Western Belarus) operate in Poland.

1939 – The Soviet Union attacks Poland and occupies half of its territory. During the invasion, the NKVD and the Red Army commit numerous war crimes.

1939–1941 – The murder of Poles continues. Hundreds of thousands are transported to Siberia in cattle cars. According to documents, Sikorski, who is in London, is convinced that at least 1.5 million Poles are victims of deportation.

1940 – 22,000 representatives of the Polish elite are shot as part of the Katyn massacre. Due to the secrecy surrounding this murder, Sikorski is unaware of it at the time.

1941 – when the Wehrmacht invades the Soviet Union, NKVD officers massacre political prisoners in the border zone who they did not manage to evacuate. At least 20,000 people are killed. A large proportion of them are Poles. Sikorski learns about this from the German press, which reports extensively on the events.

As you can see, quite a lot has accumulated over those twenty-four years of communist rule. In total, tens of millions of people were killed and tens of millions were repressed. All this has had a particularly severe impact on the Polish nation. According to calculations by the Memorial organization, in the second half of the 1930s, Poles were the most repressed ethnic group in the entire Soviet Union in percentage terms.

Despite this, on July 30, 1941, General Władysław Sikorski signed a pact with the Soviet Union to fight together against Germany. Under this pact, the two countries became allies, and units of General Władysław Anders' army began to form alongside the Red Army. Anders had been released from Lubyanka prison, where he had been tortured by the NKVD since 1939, for this purpose.

I am sorry, but if this is not a "disgrace" to the nation, if this is not a pact with a heinous genocidal maniac, then I really do not know what is. Nevertheless, when someone today says that Sikorski made a mistake by aligning himself with the Soviets, everyone just shakes their heads in disbelief. The same was true in 1941. General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, who opposed the agreement, was considered a "right-wing fanatic" and a madman.

I really cannot understand why a pact with an authoritarian dictatorship, of which there were many in Europe at the time, concluded in 1939, should be more immoral than an alliance concluded two years later with the most bloody and genocidal system known to the world at that time. Nevertheless, most Poles, raised on our historically correct literature, will answer without hesitation: the pact with Stalin – good, the pact with Hitler – bad; General Sikorski coming to an agreement with Stalin – good, Beck coming to an agreement with Hitler – bad. This is a very childish approach. Unless, of course, one believes, as many Westerners still do, that Hitler was the devil incarnate and Stalin a peace-loving democratic leader who helped tame that devil.

When you ask why it was inappropriate to come to an agreement with Hitler, but acceptable to do so with Stalin, you will not hear any logical arguments. At best, you will hear some nonsense and empty platitudes. Or a statement that Sikorski did the right thing by coming to an agreement with the Soviets, because thanks to this, it was possible to get the Poles who had been exiled there in 1939–1941 out of that inhuman land. However, the most important reason why we say today that an alliance with Hitler would have been beneficial for us is precisely the same. By signing the pact with Ribbentrop, Beck would have saved Poles from German repression. And not 120,000, because that is how many people left with Anders from that inhuman land, but several million.

Let us take a look at the overall “achievements” of both dictators. Although Adolf Hitler did everything he could between 1939 and 1945 to match his Kremlin masters in terms of murder, he did not even come close. He probably murdered several million civilians, while Lenin, Stalin, and company murdered at least fifty million. The Poles – as well as the British and Americans – thus allied themselves with a much greater genocidal maniac than Hitler, and to this day almost no one considers this to be wrong.

This is simply because history is written by the victors. It is no coincidence that National Socialism was portrayed in Western Europe – with considerable help from Soviet agents and pro-Soviet intellectuals – as the sole and absolute evil. Until recently, communist crimes were denied, and today, when documents confirming them have come to light, they are downplayed or justified.

This situation was and remains convenient for both sides. It was convenient for the Anglo-Saxons, who could thus morally justify their alliance with Stalin, and of course for the Bolsheviks, and today for the ruling camp in Russia, which has its roots in that formation. The problem is that this is not true. The victims of National Socialism and communism deserve equal remembrance and respect. Pretending now that our alliance with Stalin was less compromising than an alliance with Hitler would have been is simply frivolous.

"If two times two is considered an indisputable formula," said one of the characters in Józef Mackiewicz's *Nie trzeba głośno mówić (No Need to Speak Loudly*), "then the formula in which siding with one murderer against another murderer is a disgrace, and taking the side of the second murderer against the first murderer is a glorious service to the homeland, the world, and democracy... seems to me to be at least debatable."

The argument often heard to justify the dirty alliance between the Allies and the Soviet Union goes something like this: "To defeat Satan, we had to use the devil." So I would respond: why not the other way around? Why shouldn't the Poles have used "Satan" to defeat "the devil" in 1939? Especially since, contrary to our belief, the Polish contribution to the defeat of the Third Reich was not decisive at all. They would have managed without us. Hitler was doomed to defeat in any case in his confrontation with the economically much more powerful Western powers.

Our assistance to Germany in its fight against the Soviet Union could prove decisive. By breaking up the red empire, we would at least have done humanity a huge favor. Crushing the communist system in Russia in 1941 – rather than in 1991 – would have spared humanity enormous suffering. There would have been no Soviet repression after 1945, and there would probably have been no red China, Cambodia, Vietnam, or Korea. There would also have been no Fidel Castro and other communist criminals from Central and South America. Today, we would view communism as a sick, genocidal ideology that was born in Russia in 1917 and, fortunately, died in the same Russia a quarter of a century later. Just as we view National Socialism today...

The authors of The Black Book of Communism estimate, and these are extremely conservative estimates, that communists around the world murdered 100 million people. If Józef Beck had made a different decision in 1939 and, as a result, the headquarters of world communism had ceased to exist two years later, most of these people would not have been killed. And that we would have crushed the communist monster in alliance with another criminal regime? Well, to those who would turn up their noses, we could always say that in order to defeat the devil, it was necessary to ally with Satan.

In *Na rozdrożach historii (At the Crossroads of History)*, Andrzej Wielowieyski wrote: “I do not long for romantic, messianic visions of the nation’s fate. However, I must admit that Słowacki’s vision of Poland as the Winkelried of nations has indeed come true. Just as the legendary Swiss hero drew enemy spears toward himself, creating a breach in the enemy ranks, so Poland in 1939 took the blow that it could have avoided and thereby saved our civilization."

Unfortunately, in this case, I cannot agree with Wielowieyski. The saddest thing about this whole story is that Beck, by rejecting the offer made to him by Germany, did not save Western civilization at all. It would have dealt with Hitler anyway. Beck saved the Soviet Union in this way. The most terrible and genocidal regime known to the world at that time. A regime that was also a mortal enemy of the Republic of Poland and repaid it for this
"favor" in a truly diabolical way. This is one of the grim paradoxes of our unfortunate history.

Chapter 11

Field synagogues on the Eastern Front

I once visited the home of one of the best Polish émigré historians specializing in World War II. He himself had fought against the Germans in the ranks of Władysław Anders' army. At the table, a conversation arose about the possibility of a Polish-German alliance. "You know," he said, "for some time now, analyzing the misfortunes that have befallen us, I have been leaning towards the opinion that we should have gone with Hitler. There is only one but. The Jews..."

Before the war, there were well over three million Jews living in Poland, and they were the group of Polish citizens who suffered the most horrific and brutal persecution during World War II. After defeating Poland, the Germans implemented a truly diabolical plan for the "final solution of the Jewish question" in the occupied territories. It is estimated that around three million Polish Jews alone were killed.

When considering the possibility of accepting Adolf Hitler's offer and Warsaw joining the Berlin-Tokyo-Rome axis, this issue cannot be ignored. There is a danger that the Poles would be embroiled in the Holocaust by their ally. The government in Warsaw could be forced to hand over its Jews to the Germans. Berlin exerted varying degrees of pressure on all countries allied with the Reich in this matter.

What would Poles have done in such a situation? Researchers close to Jan Tomasz Gross's circle would probably agree that we would have willingly expelled our Jewish fellow citizens. Perhaps we would even have murdered them ourselves to save the Germans the trouble. Historians from the so-called patriotic school would probably respond with the opposite view: Poles would bravely defend their Jews, even at the risk of seriously damaging relations with their German ally.

The former point to widespread anti-Semitism in pre-war Poland and a growing fascination with totalitarianism. These fears may be confirmed by a conversation between Józef Lipski, the Polish ambassador in Berlin, and Hitler, which took place shortly before the Polish-German breakup. The Polish diplomat said at the time that if the Führer helped the Republic of Poland solve the Jewish problem, the Poles would build him a beautiful monument in the central square in Warsaw as a token of their gratitude.

All these arguments must, of course, be taken into account, but there is still a long way from such declarations and Polish anti-Semitism – mainly economic, not racial – to the murder of people. Ambassador Lipski, in making these statements, which, it must be admitted, were fatal in light of the events that were to occur during World War II, did not, of course, have the lighting of crematoria in mind. He was referring to the project of mass emigration to Palestine, which was popular at the time in Germany and Poland, and especially in Zionist circles.

It seems more accurate to say that accepting Hitler's offer and Poland's accession to the Anti-Comintern Pact would have significantly alleviated the fate of Polish Jews compared to what actually happened to them. It would probably have saved the lives of a large number of them. Here, I will again refer to my conversations – this time with two Israeli historians.

The first was Israel Gutman, a distinguished professor at Yad Vashem and a former prisoner of Auschwitz and several other camps. We discussed the term "Polish death camp," which frequently appears in the Western press and is harmful to Poland. Gutman listed the reasons why

the Germans built Auschwitz and other centers of mass extermination in occupied Poland:

"Please note that it was here that they could do this with complete impunity. In Poland, there was no local government or local administration, no institutions independent of the Germans that could keep an eye on them. Poland was under total occupation, and Hitler could do whatever he wanted on its territory. He was the absolute master of the situation," said the historian.

The second researcher I spoke to was Professor Martin van Creveld, a renowned expert on 20th-century military history. He listened to everything I had to say about Beck. When I expressed my concern about the fate of the Jews if a Polish-German alliance were to be formed, he said briefly: “The paradox of history is that Jews had a much better chance of survival in countries allied with Germany than in countries that fought against Germany and were occupied by it.”

Let us imagine that Poland became an ally of the Third Reich in 1939. Both countries worked closely together to prepare for war with the Soviet Union, and then attacked their eastern neighbor. With its large army, considerable potential, and strategic location, Poland becomes Hitler's most important ally in Europe, second only to Japan in terms of strength within the entire Axis constellation.

Can you imagine an SS company suddenly crossing the Polish-German border, boarding a train, getting off near the town of Oświęcim, and starting to fence off the old Austro-Hungarian barracks with barbed wire? And then the SS men attack passers-by with their weapons and herd those citizens of an allied country whom they consider to be racially impure "at a glance" into the barracks? This is, of course, absurd.

These SS officers would have been immediately shot by soldiers from the nearest Polish Army garrison, and Ribbentrop would have had to give detailed explanations and apologize for the incident. One thing is certain – German death camps could not have been established on Polish soil. There would be no Majdanek, Auschwitz, Sobibór, Chełmno nad Nerem, Treblinka, or Bełżec.

No plan for the mass extermination of Polish Jews on Polish soil could have been carried out without the full logistical cooperation of the Polish authorities. In order to commit crimes on such a scale, it was necessary to have police forces, means of transport, and, above all, documentation, because these Jews had to be identified somehow.

The idea that the government of the not particularly astute but essentially good-natured Sławoj Składkowski could have collaborated with the Germans in murdering its Jews is simply sickening and downright offensive to Poland and Poles. Perhaps in the 1930s, Jews were not particularly popular in Poland – unfortunately, anti-Semitism was present not only in the National Democratic camp, but also in the Sanation camp – but the assumption that we would suddenly start slaughtering our own citizens of Jewish origin is simply unworthy.

After all, if the Poles had such bloodthirsty intentions, they would not have needed the Germans for that. Between 1918 and 1939, the Republic of Poland was an independent state. The fate of the 3.5 million Jews living in our territory was then in the hands of the Polish authorities. However, these authorities did not cause any serious harm to the Jews.

If Poland had formed an alliance with Germany, Berlin would have tried, at most, to persuade the Poles to introduce anti-Jewish legislation on their territory. And over time, if the war had lasted longer and Hitler had begun to implement his terrible Holocaust program, Berlin would probably – as I have already mentioned – have demanded that Polish Jews be handed over to him. In other words, it would have made the same demands that it actually made of its allies during World War II.

As a rule, these demands were rejected. And this was done by countries much weaker than Poland, which played a marginal role in the Axis alliance system. What is more, Germany encountered such resistance

even in countries that had been much more anti-Semitic than Poland before the war. However, Germany did not start wars over this, recognizing that the "Jewish question" was less important than keeping its few allies.

Take Hungary, for example. Already at the end of 1938 and the beginning of 1939, the conservative regent Miklós Horthy introduced anti-Jewish legislation in his country. The number of Jews in the liberal professions was limited, and entrepreneurs were prohibited from employing too many people of this nationality. Many of them were deprived of their right to vote in elections. Finally, in 1941, under pressure from the Germans, extremely severe restrictions were introduced.

Hungarians were forbidden to marry Jews, and spontaneous anti-Jewish demonstrations and acts of violence broke out. Approximately 800,000 Hungarian citizens of Jewish nationality became second-class citizens. Many of them were forced into labor brigades, where they had to perform hard labor. This also happened behind the army lines on the Eastern Front.

At the same time, however, both Admiral Horthy and Prime Minister Miklós Kállay strongly opposed German pressure to hand over Hungarian Jews and send them to Auschwitz. The Hungarians may not have been fond of the Jews, but they would never have agreed to their physical extermination. Horthy wrote in his memoirs that when he heard about what the Germans were doing in the death camps, he was "horrified" and considered it "barbaric." There is also a transcript of a conversation between Horthy and Hitler, in which the Hungarian leader clearly expresses his disapproval of Germany's brutal anti-Jewish policy.

He managed to resist German pressure for almost the entire war, until March 19, 1944. On that day, the Germans, who had learned of the admiral's secret peace negotiations with the Western Allies, entered Budapest and staged a coup d'état. The new cabinet they installed was much more pro-German and much more willing to comply with the demands of their powerful ally.

It was only after the coup – i.e. almost at the very end of the war – that the Germans were able to start sending transports of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. This operation was organized by Adolf Eichmann. In the summer of 1944, when the situation on the front began to look dire for the Germans, Horthy dismissed the pro-German government and halted the deportation of Jews. As a result, around 250,000 of them were saved.

Another example is Bulgaria. Between 1941 and 1944, the country fought on the side of the Axis powers. Like Hungary, it introduced racial laws on its territory that discriminated against Jewish citizens. These laws restricted their access to certain positions, introduced quotas at universities, and even prohibited mixed marriages. The Bulgarian authorities also handed over several thousand Jews from the occupied parts of Macedonia and Thrace to the Germans.

On the other hand, despite intense pressure from Heinrich Himmler, Sofia did not agree to the deportation of Jews with Bulgarian citizenship. Local intellectuals, political party leaders, the Orthodox Church, and public opinion strongly opposed this. As a result, 50,000 Bulgarian Jews were not harmed until the end of the war. It was only after 1948 and the establishment of Israel that these people left for the Middle East.

In the summer of 2011, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was visiting Sofia, acknowledged this. "The Bulgarians, although they were Hitler's allies, did the best during the Holocaust," the Israeli leader announced. "Your country is underappreciated. This is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, such stories. The greatest in terms of how many people took part in this undertaking, how many people opposed the Germans." Needless to say, we will never hear such words in Warsaw, even though we fought so bravely against the Germans from the first to the last day of the war.

It is also worth taking a look at Romania. Although the pro-German authorities there pursued their own anti-Semitic policy of extermination and carried out a series of bloody pogroms

and murders, around 60 percent of Romanian Jews survived the war. Dictator Ion Antonescu – although not a lover of Jews – was, like Horthy, reluctant to hand over his Jewish citizens to the Germans.

The situation was similar in Italy. Anti-Jewish laws were passed, but there was no question of deportation to German death camps. Benito Mussolini and Pope Pius XII tried to protect Italian Jews and torpedo any ideas of handing them over to the Germans. Deportations did not begin until September 1943, when Italy surrendered and, as a result, a large part of the country came under German occupation.

Even then, the deportations did not reach large proportions. It is estimated that only ten thousand Italian Jews died during the war. The Italians also tried to hinder German extermination plans in the territories they occupied. They refused to help round up Jews in the Balkans and France. The latter even prompted Ribbentrop to write a complaint to Mussolini. "There is a lack of proper understanding of the Jewish question in Italian military circles," the diplomat wrote irritably.

The case of Finland is also extremely interesting. Not only did the Finnish government have no desire to mimic the sick anti-Semitic laws of the Third Reich, but it also sent about 300 of its Jews in uniform to the Eastern Front. They fought alongside the Wehrmacht against the Soviets near Leningrad. In front of German soldiers, they took part in services in a field synagogue conducted by field rabbis. What is more, Hitler awarded three Finnish Jews with Iron Crosses, which they did not accept.

The situation took a dramatic turn in those countries that were not allies of the Third Reich but were ruled by puppet collaborationist governments installed by Berlin. The authorities, composed of local fascists, eagerly carried out all of Germany's criminal orders. This was the case, for example, in Croatia and Slovakia, where a significant proportion of the local Jewish population was murdered.

American historian Professor Timothy Snyder wrote: “Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians want the world to remember that their countries were destroyed as a result of German-Soviet cooperation. This turn of events had a decisive impact on the fate of these nations, but it was even more significant for the Jews. For a Jew who lived in an area where state structures had been destroyed during the war, the chances of survival were 1 in 20. Where the state survived, the chances were 1 in 2. This also applied to Romania, Italy, Hungary, and Bulgaria, which were allies of Germany, and even to the Third Reich itself. The destruction of states therefore had far-reaching consequences.

What would happen to Jews in Poland? As I have already written, it is difficult to imagine that the Polish authorities would agree to hand over their Jewish citizens to the Germans. We are not talking about tens or even hundreds of thousands of people, but about three and a half million. As we know, Poles were extremely sensitive about matters of prestige. They would therefore probably react very harshly to such a demand.

It is highly probable that as long as we remained an ally of the Third Reich, our Jews would not have suffered any greater harm. Perhaps, like their Finnish co-religionists, they would even have fought on the Eastern Front with eagles on their caps. It is estimated that during the September campaign, approximately
150,000 Jews fought in the Polish Army during the September campaign. This was a force that the Polish army would not have given up because of the ideological whims of its German ally.

The Germans might not even have been able to persuade the Poles to introduce discriminatory laws modeled on the Nuremberg Laws on their territory. The Sanation regime, although not immune to the bite of nationalism, was much more liberal and favorable to Jews than other regimes in Central and Eastern Europe.

And given its strength, it would be easier for the Republic of Poland to resist Germany than, for example, Hungary. For whoever has a stronger army has a stronger voice.

It is difficult to imagine that even Hitler would be so crazy as to jeopardize an alliance with such a valuable ally as Poland because of – to use his own words – “some Jews.” The only trouble would probably arise during the transport of German units traveling through Poland to the eastern front.

Indoctrinated by the anti-Semitic propaganda of the NSDAP, German soldiers – especially those from police and SS units – could commit anti-Jewish acts during marches or stops at railway stations. However, each time such situations arose, Poland would probably send sharp protests to Berlin, and the German hooligans would have to deal with the Polish Army's field military police. Incidentally, the latter is still known today for its heavy-handedness, which should cure the Germans of similar ideas.

However, the situation could have taken a completely different turn if, at the end of the war, Poland had changed alliances and gone to war with its existing allies. If Poland had lost such a war – which seems unlikely – then the Hungarian scenario could indeed have been realized. Poland would have found itself under occupation and the fate of our Jews would have been in the hands of the Germans.

However, this would have happened at least several years later than in reality. Not in 1939, but at the very end of the war. This suggests that the Germans would simply not have had time to murder Polish Jews. As the terrible practice of the bloody 20th century has shown, it is not at all easy to exterminate several million people.

After all, the Germans would have had to concentrate the Jews in ghettos, build camps, then transport them there and kill them. If they had started doing this in 1945, many Polish Jews would probably have survived, because it would not have been possible to build the necessary infrastructure quickly. The Germans would have had to carry out the Holocaust either at home – which, as we know, they were not particularly keen to do – or in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union.

This, in turn, would have entailed significant logistical problems. It was much easier to transport 400,000 Hungarian Jews from Budapest to Auschwitz, 300 kilometers away, than 3 million Polish Jews from Warsaw to, say, Smolensk, 800 kilometers away, which would also be complicated by the difference in rail gauge.

The paradox, then, is that by allying itself with Hitler, the Polish government would have saved a large proportion of the 3.5 million Polish Jews from extermination. In other words, it would have fulfilled its duty, which it could not fulfill because it irresponsibly allowed war with the anti-Semitic Third Reich, and then fled along the Zaleszczycka road, leaving citizens of Jewish origin at the mercy of the occupier.

Chapter 12

Hitler, friend of the Poles

So far, we have considered one scenario, or rather alternative scenarios. What would have happened if Poland had accepted the Third Reich's offer? What consequences would this move have had for the Republic of Poland, Germany, the Soviet Union, and the world? I believe that the consequences would have been enormous. Poland played its greatest role in history in the spring of 1939. More precisely, it was Foreign Minister Józef Beck who played this role by making a fatal decision that changed the course of history. It lost Poland, but saved the Soviet Union. Stalin should have erected a monument to him in Red Square.

Let us now take a look at the course of events in those decisive months preceding the September catastrophe. This was not only the most important period in the history of the Republic of Poland, but also one of the most distorted and misunderstood. According to the version of events that is still accepted today – repeated ad nauseam in textbooks, monographs, and press articles – Józef Beck had no choice in 1939. What is more, by dragging Poland into war at such a fatal moment, and against two enemies, he did a great job.

"The following picture emerges," wrote Grzegorz Górski in his *September 1939: Alternative Reflections*. "Adolf Hitler, intoxicated by the vision of building a 'Thousand-Year Reich,' decides at the end of 1938 to deal with Poland. Thanks to the strenuous efforts of Polish diplomacy, we manage to gain powerful allies, but then Hitler comes to an agreement with Stalin, who is hungry for revenge on Poland for the humiliation of 1920. War breaks out, which by no means could end in any kind of success. Germany had an overwhelming advantage, our allies betrayed us, and the Soviets stabbed us in the back. From this perspective, even minor or major mistakes made by our own high command or political leadership could not have had a serious impact on the course of events. The most important thing is that we were the first to resist Hitler, that a world war broke out, and that we found ourselves on the right side.

Professor Grzegorz Górski, like the late eminent historians Professors Jerzy Łojek and Paweł Wieczorkiewicz, considered this view to be extremely naive, infantile, and above all, untrue. It was seen as the product not so much of reliable scientific research and cool analysis of sources, but rather of the emotional and patriotic approach characteristic of Poles. One of the symptoms of this Polish affliction is the refusal to admit one's own mistakes and the tendency to shift responsibility for all of one's country's failures onto others. The truth is painful – the last government of the Second Polish Republic made colossal mistakes on the eve of the war. Instead of pursuing a cautious and responsible policy, our leaders acted recklessly and brought enormous misfortune upon their own citizens.

Worse still, the most important of them, Józef Beck – a man who played such a grim role in the history of his nation – is still placed on a pedestal and treated as a hero. In 2009, on the 70th anniversary of the September catastrophe, three Polish politicians, former foreign ministers Władysław Bartoszewski and Adam Rotfeld, and former head of the Sejm's Foreign Affairs Committee Paweł Zalewski, appealed for a street in Warsaw to be named after Beck.

Their open letter on this matter, published in Rzeczpospolita, is a noteworthy document as a classic example of patriotic correctness. "If this absurd enthusiasm for

"The man who spoke of honor" was repeated by journalists, even by historians—which is bad enough—commented Rafał A. Ziemkiewicz on that letter in Rzeczpospolita. "But when this is done by people whom Poland has entrusted, and may entrust again in the future, with conducting its affairs on the international stage, it simply makes your hair stand on end. Gentlemen! For God's sake, the value of a leader is measured by the results of his actions, not by grandiose gestures. A leader deserves respect when he wins a battle."

Here are two excerpts from the appeal by these three politicians, aptly titled: *The man who spoke of honor*:

1. "We are stronger when we remember that Poland was the first to oppose the two criminal totalitarian regimes of the 20th century."

With all due respect to the esteemed authors of the letter, this statement sounds like a joke. As a result of Beck's decision that "Poland will be the first to oppose the two criminal totalitarian regimes of the 20th century," our country was literally plowed under. Burned and drowned in blood. First, in 1939, two steamrollers ran over it – the Soviet and German ones – and then, in 1944 and 1945, the Soviet steamroller turned back and "leveled" what was left.

As a result of the irresponsible decision to expose Poland to the first strike of the armies of both totalitarian giants, several million of our citizens were murdered, including a large part of the elite. Factories, cities, and infrastructure were demolished. We were deprived of our independence and half of our territory was amputated. The losses inflicted on the Polish state were enormous.

We felt the painful effects of this nightmare not only 10, 20, 30, or 40 years after World War II—we still feel them today. And our children and grandchildren will feel them too. This war set us back decades in our development and destroyed the achievements of many generations. How can the apocalypse that befell us in 1939–1945 be called a factor that strengthened our country?

The Second Polish Republic was a country still building its foundations. However, through enormous projects and the work of its citizens, it was gaining political and economic strength and improving its international standing. The war destroyed all of this. Having been the first to "stand up to the two criminal totalitarian regimes of the 20th century," we did not become stronger, as the esteemed authors of the letter wrote, but weaker. Much weaker.

There is no doubt that if it weren't for the disastrous course of World War II, which Beck brought about, we would now be a much more powerful country. I can understand, at a stretch, the arguments that Beck's decision saved our honor or preserved our dignity, but that it made us stronger? Gentlemen, it is simply inappropriate to write such things.

2. "The 70th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II is the right moment to permanently commemorate those great Poles who rendered outstanding service to the defense of our homeland's independence," wrote the authors of the letter, which, we would like to remind you, is an appeal to name a street in Warsaw after Beck.

Reading this passage, one might get the impression that there has been a misunderstanding and that it actually refers to a different historical figure. To compliment Beck, one could really come up with a number of more appropriate reasons. One could write that he was a brave soldier in his youth (he was eventually awarded the Virtuti Militari), that he was popular with women, or that he was an animal lover. But for God's sake, anything but that he "rendered outstanding service to the defense of our homeland's independence."

Beck was a man who contributed significantly to the loss of our homeland's independence. Regardless of his intentions, which were undoubtedly noble,

because of him we lost our independence for six long decades. It was as a result of his reckless actions in 1939 that we had to fight a war against both Germany and the Soviets at the same time and were fatally defeated. I will repeat after Ziemkiewicz: "the value of a leader is measured by the results of his actions."

But let's leave Bartoszewski, Rotfeld, and Zalewski's letter alone, which is written in a similar tone throughout. Those interested can refer to the original, which can easily be found on the internet. In fact, only the first sentence makes sense. "Józef Beck's policy could not prevent the outbreak of war." I completely agree. Our unfortunate minister did not have such a great influence on history. War had to break out, but it certainly did not have to start in Poland, and thus it certainly did not have to end so fatally for us.

I will begin my reconstruction of the events that led Poland to catastrophe with the main player at the time, Adolf Hitler. And once again, following Professor Grzegorz Górski, I appeal: let us not look at the leader of the Third Reich through the prism of his bloody Polenpolitik between September 1939 and April 1945. Let us not look at him through the prism of war crimes, Palmir, Auschwitz, roundups, and the hecatomb of the Warsaw Uprising. None of this had happened yet.

It is the turn of the year 1938 and 1939, and Adolf Hitler is the most favorable to Poland of all German leaders to date. He is a Polonophile. In light of the immensity of the crimes and suffering that this man brought upon our nation, this statement seems shocking. However, that was the case. One of the fundamental questions I encounter in various discussions is: Did the concept of a Polish-German agreement ever have a chance of being realized? After all, Hitler hated Poles, and after the Jews, we were the main target of his extermination policy. He considered us subhuman!

All of this is true. Hitler hated Poles. But he only developed this feeling towards us in the spring of 1939 , when we rejected his offer of a joint expedition to the East and thus thwarted his plans. It was then that he truly hated us with all his soul (if, of course, this man had a soul). It was from that moment that the leader of the Third Reich's aversion and hostility towards Poles began. It may sound surprising, but he simply changed his opinion about Poles...

To understand this paradox, let us take a look at Polish-German relations in the interwar period. Since 1918, they had been in a dire state. The borders of the revived Republic of Poland included large areas of the German Empire that had been defeated during World War I. Taking advantage of the critical situation of its neighbor, which had been overthrown by the British and French, Poland took Eastern Pomerania, Greater Poland, and part of Silesia from it.

The border established in this way and accepted in Versailles roughly coincided with the western border of the First Polish Republic, which was considered in Poland to be a redress for the injustices of the partitions. In Berlin, of course, this was perceived quite differently – as an annexation of German territory by the Poles. Several hundred thousand Germans found themselves on the Polish side of the border, and the plebiscites in Silesia were accompanied by bloodshed. All this poisoned relations between Berlin and Warsaw.

Germany, considering itself wronged, sought to revise the Treaty of Versailles. Almost all cabinets of the Weimar Republic demanded a return to the pre-1914 borders. Tension in relations with Berlin was a nightmare for Warsaw. It made Poland's international situation extremely difficult and its importance on the international stage insignificant. In 1922, Germany concluded the Treaty of Rapallo with Bolshevik Russia, which posed a mortal danger to the Republic of Poland.

The specter of partition looms over Warsaw once again. "Poland's existence is unbearable, incompatible with Germany's basic conditions for life. Poland must disappear, and it will disappear as a result of its own internal weakness and through Russia. With our help," wrote Hans von Seeckt, Chief of the German General Staff at the time. These words expressed the views of the majority of the German elite at the time.

Poland's search for an ally in distant France was to no avail. In 1925, Paris concluded the Locarno Treaty with Berlin, which guaranteed the permanence of the German-French border, but left the issue of the German-Polish border open. That same year, a customs war with Germany began, blocking Polish exports to Germany and German imports to Poland. For the Republic of Poland, this had disastrous consequences.

Relations between the neighbors in the years 1918–1933 can undoubtedly be described as a cold war. Obviously, it was the weaker party that suffered from this permanent tension. That is, Poland, which, to make matters worse, bordered the Soviet Union to the east. A totalitarian, genocidal colossus that made no secret of its goal to conquer Poland and impose its own political system on it.

It was under these circumstances that the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) seized power in Germany in 1933. It was expected that its leader, Adolf Hitler, a declared nationalist and chauvinist, would pursue an extremely anti-Polish policy, which would make the strategy of the previous governments of the Weimar Republic seem downright conciliatory.

Only King Gustav V of Sweden had a different opinion. He summoned the Polish ambassador in Stockholm and told him: “Everyone says that Hitler’s first target will be Poland. I met him briefly in Berlin and did not get that impression at all. This man is primarily interested in internal reforms and has no anti-Polish sentiments." Józef Beck later commented on this: "Marshal Piłsudski sensed the same thing from a distance."

They were both right. To the surprise of all of Europe, Hitler reached out to Poland and announced that he wanted to reconcile with Germany's "brave neighbor." At his first diplomatic reception, he talked at length and shook hands with Polish envoy Alfred Wysocki. The conversation lasted so long that the head of diplomatic protocol had to interrupt it. Hitler sent his regards to Marshal Józef Piłsudski and expressed his hope for a radical change in relations between Berlin and Warsaw.

National Socialism proved to be a revolutionary force which, immediately after its election victory, set about destroying the old order and turning Germany upside down. As it turned out, this also applied to foreign policy. As a result, a great détente prevailed between Warsaw and Berlin. And over time, relations these, of course compared to the previous ones, became downright friendly.

“By initiating a new phase in relations with the Republic of Poland in 1933–1934,” wrote Professor Stanisław Żerko, “the Nazi dictator proved that he intended to radically reevaluate the existing principles of German eastern policy. To the surprise of many of his associates and supporters, and contrary to the position of the vast majority of conservative German diplomats, for whom the main goal was to revise the Treaty of Versailles, Hitler embarked on a path of reconciliation with Poland.”

This politician – who would go down in history as one of the greatest criminals in human history and the greatest executioner of Poles – was fond of unexpected twists and turns on the international stage. His policy, which would later lead to the downfall of the Reich, was based on his personal hunches, impulses, and emotions. And in 1933, Adolf Hitler felt... sympathy for the Poles.

There were three main reasons for this:

1. "Hitler is more Austrian than Prussian," said Józef Beck during the period of Polish-German détente. This meant that he was unfamiliar with the anti-Polish prejudices characteristic of the inhabitants of the territories bordering the Republic of Poland, which were extremely influential in the Weimar Republic, not to mention the pre-war German Empire.

Hitler not only disagreed with the conservative Prussian junkers in their starched collars and pince-nez glasses. As a true revolutionary, he simply hated these people. The problem of the "Polish Corridor," which separated East Prussia from the rest of Germany, was of secondary importance to Hitler, an Austrian. While he was not fond of the Czechs or Hungarians, he rarely criticized the Poles.

During the period of Polish-German détente between 1934 and 1939, he spoke of us in superlative terms. As historian Jerzy Borejsza emphasized in his *book Adolf Hitler's Anti-Slavism*, Poles were for him "a slightly different type of Slavs." As a people who were decidedly hostile towards Russia/the Soviets and strongly rooted in Latin culture, Poles were very distanced from the Pan-Slavic ideology that Hitler hated.

The future Führer encountered her in Vienna, which was full of Czechs, and considered her a huge threat to German influence and interests in Central and Eastern Europe. His aversion to Slavs did not prevent him from making an exception for Poles. Just as later, during the war, he made an exception for the Slovaks and Croats, whom he opposed to the pro-Russian Serbs. He also spoke of the "brave" Bulgarian soldiers.

2. Adolf Hitler was a staunch anti-communist, which is why he saw Poles as kindred spirits. He was greatly impressed by Poland's victory over the Bolsheviks in the war of 1919–1921. It is known that the future Führer followed this conflict with great attention. For him, the Polish victory not only meant personal satisfaction, but also saved Germany from Bolshevization, which Hitler was well aware of.

“The victories of the Poles over the Red Army,” wrote Polish historian Eugeniusz Cezary Król, “and the successful conclusion of [that] war forced him to modify [his anti-Polish] ideas. The existence of a state in the east, with a powerful army at its disposal, was a fact that could not be ignored."

"It is also difficult to find in Hitler a hereditary hatred of Poland," wrote German historian Martin Broszat, "nurtured by the 'German borderland' (*Grenzland Deutschtum*) living between East Prussia and Upper Silesia. In the speeches and writings of the ‘Austrian’ Hitler, it is difficult to find any evidence of specific hatred towards Poland. This was in contrast to his attitude towards the Czechs and Hungarians, towards whom Hitler never shook off his inherited German-Austrian resentment. His attitude towards Poland before 1939 was rather free of such feelings. On the contrary, Hitler's admiration for Piłsudski, the victor over the Red Army in 1920, led him to a rather friendly assessment of the political and military potential of the Polish nation. For many years, this assessment overshadowed his theoretical idea of the racial inferiority of the Slavs.

It was in 1920 that Hitler became convinced of the strength of the Polish army and the fighting spirit of Polish soldiers. He considered Poland to be a country to be taken seriously and one that could prove to be a valuable ally. Hitler is known to have said, "Give me Polish infantry and I will conquer the world." The world may be too strong a word, but he certainly had the Soviet Union in mind in this context.

3. Adolf Hitler adored Józef Piłsudski. For him, Piłsudski was the conqueror of the Bolsheviks, an authoritarian leader with great personal charisma – which impressed the future Führer most – who broke in his country with "party politics" and introduced strong-arm rule. It was probably also significant that the Marshal came from a socialist tradition that was so dear to Hitler.

Personal reasons also played a role here. In 1930, Piłsudski was the first European leader to predict that the rapidly growing National Socialist movement could seize power in Germany. And, as the émigré historian Piotr Wandycz later described, he was the first to send his special secret envoy to Hitler. "Tell Mr. Hitler that he must hurry. I am already old," he reportedly said to him as he left.

During a conversation in Munich, this man presented Piłsudski's proposal to Hitler. After the NSDAP came to power, there was to be a shift in relations between the two countries and the signing of an anti-Soviet pact. As the Marshal's secret envoy said, Piłsudski was well aware that Western countries would not lift a finger to defend Poland against the Soviets (and Beck later dared to call him his student!), which is why he was "turning his attention to Germany."

The arrival of the Marshal's envoy made a tremendous impression on Hitler. The future dictator was simply bursting with pride. "The construction of our SA is not yet complete, the party is still in its infancy , , and here , , , , , , , a foreign country with foreign policy problems, and we cannot shy away from taking a position on it," he told his associates.

"I am determined to take up Piłsudski's offer and, immediately after taking power, conclude a ten-year agreement with Poland. What a response such an agreement will have in Germany and around the world! Germany is once again capable of forming alliances! Germany is reaching out to its former enemy!" – excited leader of the NSDAP during a conversation with the envoy from Warsaw.

Four years later, now as chancellor, he kept the promise he had made to Piłsudski. On January 26, 1934, the Polish-German pact was signed. But I will come back to that soon...

Hitler never forgot that Piłsudski appreciated him when "the party was still in its infancy." At the end of the Marshal's life, he even made fantastic plans to meet him in a train carriage on the border between the two countries. And after his death – which he took very hard – he even considered coming to Warsaw for the funeral. Ultimately, he sent Hermann Göring, who shuffled awkwardly behind the coffin, and organized a ceremony in Berlin with great pomp and circumstance.

Tomasz Łubieński wrote about it as follows: “Chancellor Hitler and his dignitaries attended the funeral mass for the soul of the great deceased at St. Hedwig’s Cathedral in Berlin. Among those present were Foreign Minister von Neurath, Minister of Defense von Blomberg, Minister of Propaganda Dr. Goebbels, and Minister of Justice Dr. Frank, the future Governor-General of Wawel. Representatives of the general staff: General von Fritsch was to die in 1939 near Warsaw, von Reichenau distinguished himself in this campaign; Air Force General Milch and Admiral Raeder played a significant role in the following years of the war. Polish guests at this solemn ceremony included General Tadeusz Kutrzeba, singers Adam Didur and Jan Kiepura, the divine Pola Negri, and MP, soon to be Ambassador, Józef Lipski.

Let us add a few more facts to this description: on the day of the ceremony, flags throughout the Reich were flown at half-mast. Two Wehrmacht honor guards were stationed in front of St. Hedwig's Church in Berlin. Years later, Pola Negri wrote that during the mass she was "surprised by the devout humility with which Hitler knelt during the ceremony."

The ceremonies, which took place on May 18, were broadcast live on German radio. Earlier, the station had aired a long, extremely warm-toned program about Piłsudski. On May 21, it also broadcast live a special session of the Reichstag dedicated to the deceased Polish leader. Interestingly, due to the Marshal's funeral, it was moved from May 17 to that day.

First to speak was Göring, who, in his characteristic expressive and exaggerated tone, spoke of his alleged friendship with Piłsudski, whom he called "a great man

of the state." Then Hitler himself took the floor. At first, he spoke at length about the Marshal's virtues, and then appealed to his successors to maintain the Polish-German alliance he had concluded: "As sincere nationalists, with understanding and a sense of cordial friendship, we recognize the Polish state as the seat of a great nation imbued with nationalism."

After the Marshal's death, on Hitler's personal orders, a cult of Piłsudski spread throughout Germany, rivaling the cult surrounding Piłsudski among the Polish authorities. A good example of this is the four-volume edition *of* Piłsudski's *writings,* edited by Wacław Lipiński and published in the Third Reich. The luxurious "Marshal's edition" was subscribed to by Adolf Hitler, Joseph Goebbels, Rudolf Hess, Alfred Rosenberg, Heinrich Himmler, and Hermann Göring, among others, with Göring even writing the introduction to one of the volumes.

In many NSDAP premises, a portrait of Piłsudski hung next to portraits of Hitler. When Polish troops occupied Zaolzie in 1938 and an anti-Soviet alliance with Poland seemed almost certain, Hitler shouted excitedly: "Bravo, Poles! Old Piłsudski would be proud of you!"

A year earlier, on the twentieth anniversary of Józef Piłsudski's imprisonment in Magdeburg, Hitler ordered the demolition of the house where the German authorities were holding the Commander at the time. The building was given to Poland, transported in parts to Warsaw, where it was reconstructed in Belweder Park. Interestingly, the house survived the war and was only secretly destroyed by the communists in the late 1940s.

The fact that Hitler's sympathy for Piłsudski was not purely tactical is evidenced by the fact that even when Beck defected to the French-British camp in the spring of 1939, the Marshal was still written about very warmly in the Third Reich. Hitler, followed by the German press, emphasized that Beck, by confronting Germany, was betraying the legacy of Józef Piłsudski.

One of the caricatures that appeared in the German newspaper Der Völkische Beobachter at the time is particularly telling.

"Kladderadatsch." It depicts Marshal Piłsudski grabbing Minister Józef Beck, who is wearing a jester's cap, by the head. Piłsudski says reproachfully: "With such policies, I would never have won the Battle of Warsaw." Many similar drawings were published in Germany at the time.

Even after the end of the Polish-German war, the Germans continued to show respect for the deceased Polish leader. After capturing Krakow, they posted honor guards at the Marshal's tomb in Wawel, and throughout the General Government, schools, offices, and workplaces were allowed to hang portraits and display busts of Piłsudski until June 30, 1941.

Such a portrait even hung in the office of the military commander of Warsaw, General Karl von Neumann-Neurode. The Führer, contemplating the map of war-torn Europe in his headquarters, would sometimes pause, sigh, and say, "Ah, if only old Piłsudski were alive..."

We can see, then, that from Berlin's point of view, a Polish-German alliance was not only possible but even desirable. But what about the other side? Could the Poles have fought side by side with the Germans on the Eastern Front? During discussions about our difficult choices in 1939, I heard at least several times from more patriotic debaters that Józef Beck simply could not have agreed to a deal with the Third Reich. The Polish nation, which was extremely anti-German, would never have allowed him to do so and simply would not have allowed such a disgrace. Interestingly, this thesis is repeated by... Józef Beck himself.

"Shouldn't we try to come to some kind of agreement with Hitler?" one of his close associates asked him in the spring of 1939.

"Of course we should. But in that case, my secretary would shoot me in the head first," replied the minister.

Of course, he was not referring to his secretary, but to public opinion, which would not allow an alliance with Germany.

This is how Beck tried to justify himself – I may have acted foolishly, but it was the fault of the nation that forced me to do so. These words were an attempt to share responsibility with society for a disastrous and extremely risky decision. And although more than seventy years have passed since this statement was made, this thesis is repeated by historians and journalists. Honorable Poles would never have allowed Beck to form an alliance with that scoundrel Hitler. We would never have allowed our minister to so disgustingly tarnish the honor of the nation.

I must admit that this argument causes me considerable embarrassment. Idealizing one's homeland is a beautiful thing, but when taken too far, it can become ridiculous.

Firstly, Poland had excellent relations with the Third Reich from January 26, 1934, when it signed a non-aggression pact with it, until April 28, 1939, when Hitler terminated the pact. And somehow, this did not lead to any moral revolt on the streets of Warsaw. Of course, Beck was hated for this, but the anti-German society could have attacked him for this reason, to use today's language.

Perhaps Beck was aware of the opposition's views, such as the opinion expressed by Wincenty Witos in a conversation with British Consul Frank Savery: "Gdańsk must be given back to Germany, because we cannot go to war over it. But let Beck give it back, and then we, the opposition, will oust Beck and take his place." Even if Beck knew about such threats, he should not have been afraid of them. It was just empty talk.

Although the Republic of Poland in the 1930s was a much more pleasant place to live than present-day Poland, it was far from being a democracy. In an authoritarian system, public opinion plays a negligible role and has little influence on government actions. Indeed, the souls of Poles in the 1930s were taken over by anti-German National Democrats. But what could they actually do against Beck if he "somehow came to an agreement with Hitler"?

Collect 100,000 signatures on a protest letter? Smear Beck in their press? Bring people out onto the streets and organize anti-government demonstrations? Or maybe not vote for him in the next election? You must be joking. The National Democrats and other opponents of such an alliance would have no chance of stopping it.

A Polish historian told me about a conversation he once had with an officer from one of the pre-war regiments in Greater Poland. When asked about the possibility of a Polish-German alliance in 1939 aimed at the Soviets, the officer was outraged. He said categorically that the people of Poznań would never go east with the Germans. He stated that if they received such orders from the commander-in-chief, they would immediately disobey him and there would be some kind of rebellion in the western provinces.

With all due respect to this distinguished military officer, it is difficult to take such statements made several decades after the war seriously. The officer's emotional statement was undoubtedly based on his knowledge of the terrible crimes committed by the Germans in Poland after 1939. Indeed, it is difficult for people who survived the German occupation to imagine an alliance with the same Germans. However, it can be assumed that before 1939 they would not have been so categorical in their judgments. The animosity towards their western neighbor, which was undoubtedly enormous at the end of the 1930s, would certainly not have prevailed over military duty, oath, and loyalty to the homeland. I have too high an opinion of the Polish Army and its discipline to believe in stories of any mutinies or rebellions.

I would like to refer here to an excerpt from Józef Czapski's memoirs. In his famous book*, In a Land Unfit for Humans,* he described the first inspection of Polish prisoners of war from the camp in Griazowiec carried out by General Władysław Anders in 1941. This took place after Prime Minister Władysław Sikorski and Soviet Ambassador to London Ivan Maisky signed the Polish-Soviet pact, under which a Polish army was formed in the Soviet Union.

On a sunny, foggy autumn day, with the smell of wet earth in the air, he walked among our ranks in his worn-out uniform, which had been restored to a barely presentable condition. He walked with a cane, limping slightly (we knew that he had been seriously wounded in September 1939 and dragged through prisons in Lviv, Kiev, and Moscow), his complexion sallow, his gaze extremely attentive and focused. In the simplest of words – how moving they were – he called us all back to active service and ended his speech with the words: "We must forget old grudges... and fight to the last with our common enemy Hitler, alongside our allies, alongside the Red Army." His voice sounded unquestionable.

Czapski went on to recount the talks he had with Polish soldiers released from the labor camps who were joining Anders' army. "I ended each speech with a statement about the alliance with the Soviets. On the orders of my superiors, I demanded loyalty and camaraderie towards the Red Army. Forgetting the recent past. This passage was always received with difficulty, but the sense of discipline towards the orders of the Polish authorities was extremely strong at the time, and the authority of these authorities was unquestionable."

During his Soviet captivity from 1939 to 1941, when he was held in Lubyanka, among other places, General Anders was treated inhumanely. Let us listen to his account:

"I was pushed into a small room with a broken stove and a barred window without glass. I was not given my clothes. I was wearing only thin denim. The winter that year was exceptionally harsh. The temperature dropped below 30°C. I was given one bucket of water, which immediately froze, and another for my toilet needs. […] Every two or three days, they threw me a piece of bread and a plate of disgusting gruel. I was so weak that I didn't even feel the pain from my wounds and frostbite. […] Every few days, several NKVD officers would come in at night and conduct a thorough search of the cell and my person. The search of all my body orifices was carried out in a highly professional and brutal manner. My long beard, which had grown in prison and was full of pus dripping from my frostbitten cheeks, was also frozen solid. I was beaten and kicked during this.

Most of General Anders' soldiers went through a similar nightmare. Nevertheless, when they received such an order, all these people set about creating Polish armed forces alongside the Soviets. And if they had gone into battle on the Eastern Front, they would probably have fought excellently. Polish soldiers had a deeply ingrained sense of duty and respect for the decisions of the state authorities. Even the most unpopular ones.

Therefore, bearing in mind the history of the creation of the Polish army alongside Stalin, stories about the alleged refusal to carry out orders or the rebellion of our soldiers in the situation of forming an alliance with Hitler can be dismissed as fairy tales. If General Anders, who was tortured by the NKVD in 1941 (i.e. two years after the Soviet partition of Poland), was able to build an army with the help of the Soviets, then the aforementioned officer from Poznań would certainly not have refused the order to take part in the joint expedition.-Soviet partition of Poland) was able to build an army with the help of the Soviets, the aforementioned officer from Poznań would certainly not have refused the order to take part in a joint expedition against the Soviet Union with the Wehrmacht simply because he disliked the Germans for their attempt to suppress the Greater Poland Uprising in 1919.

"Of course, it was easier for Romanians and Hungarians to accept such an orientation [pro-German], although there was not much enthusiasm for Hitler among them either," wrote Andrzej Wielowieyski. “In Poland, this would have been more difficult due to our historical tradition, and also because the national movement was particularly anti-German and was the strongest opposition movement to the government. However, the state apparatus, and especially the army, was under the full control of Piłsudski’s supporters, who also had the support of the Church and conservative circles. The political crisis could have been serious, but manageable. A coup d'état such as the one carried out in Belgrade in March 1941 by nationalist officers led by General Dušan Simović, who overthrew the pro-German Prince Regent Pavle Karadjordjević, was rather impossible in Rydz-Śmigły's army.

Professor Paweł Wieczorkiewicz shared a similar opinion: “Many historians often argue that public opinion would not allow such a solution. As evidence, they often cite the opinion of Ambassador Łukasiewicz, who stated in a conversation with Szembek:
"If we had surrendered Gdańsk and the motorway in March, given the mood in the country at the time, the government would have fallen and the current government [of General Sikorski] would have been formed. There would have been riots in the country, followed by the invasion of Germany and the Soviet Union." This is a fatalistic view that has little to do with the reality of the time. In an authoritarian state such as the Second Polish Republic, the voice of the people was not and could not be a decisive factor.

In fact, Szembek also often used such arguments that were detached from reality.
"We had two alternatives [sic!]: either to go with the Germans or the Soviets and lose our independence, or to face disaster," he said. "We couldn't give in to anyone, because the mood in the country wouldn't allow it." All well and good, but the deputy foreign minister forgot one small detail.

It was the Sanation government that provoked the anti-German sentiments he mentioned. In the last months preceding the outbreak of World War II, the government press focused almost exclusively on attacking and ridiculing the Germans. It heated up the atmosphere to such an extent that anti-German sentiments in Poland in the summer of 1939 were boiling over and reached a level of hysteria.

It was precisely the repetition of nonsense such as "we will not give up even a button" by the Sanacja dignitaries that meant that any concessions would indeed be met with incomprehension and outrage from citizens. In this way, the government tied its own hands with its own propaganda.

So what should have been done in 1939? It would have been enough to tone down the propaganda and simply shift it to an "anti-Bolshevik direction" – you admit that Stalin himself provided ample material – to achieve the opposite effect. Constant reminders of the Polish-Bolshevik war of 1920, the terrible crimes committed in the Soviet Union, and the anti-Polish activities of the Comintern could have silenced anti-German resentment, strengthened anti-Soviet sentiment, and convinced Poles of the idea of an expedition to the East.

"Let us also consider what is often forgotten," wrote Professor Paweł Wieczorkiewicz, "that in the spring of 1939, Soviet Russia was the number one enemy for most Poles, as confirmed by the events of the entire 20th century, from the Polish-Bolshevik war to the activities of the Communist Party of Poland. Germany, meanwhile, at least for the ruling group, which had its roots in the legions and their ideology, was a forced ally during World War I, but an ally nonetheless. It can be assumed that, in conditions of limited freedom of expression and speech, shaping public opinion, which was counted on in Berlin, could only be a matter of time.

Aversion to both our western and eastern neighbors—and, let us add, not without reason—was and still is deeply rooted in the Polish consciousness. The situation is somewhat reminiscent of two pots of boiling water placed on a low heat. All it takes is to turn off one gas tap and turn the other one on to the maximum to quickly reverse the mood. This was the case in the Second Polish Republic, and it is the case in the Third.

In any case, the slogan about an expedition to the Soviets would have fallen on fertile ground. At that time, Polish society was dreaming of "Polish power," colonies, and territorial gains. And yet Poland could only become a superpower by liberating the territories then under Soviet rule and creating a powerful multinational federation. Just look at the map – expansion in any other direction was impossible. Mountains to the south, sea to the north, and a compact Germanic wall to the west.

When talking about Polish society in the 1930s, it suffices to mention the case of Beck himself. Between 1933 and 1939, the head of Polish diplomacy pursued a policy that was perceived as decidedly pro-German. This made him probably the most hated high-ranking official in society. However, thanks to this alliance, he regained two counties of Zaolzie in 1938, suddenly becoming the most popular politician in the country. This says a lot about the mood of society at the time.

Chapter 13

Between Germany and Russia

Despite the occupation of Zaolzie in cooperation with Hitler, Polish public opinion remained extremely anti-German. Incited by the National Democracy and official propaganda, Poles were eager to fight the Germans and their "paper tanks." But were there people among them who did not succumb to these sentiments and went against the tide? Who were already advocating for a rapprochement between Poland and Germany at that time? The answer is yes. There were, although – it must be admitted – they were a marginal group whose voice was not taken into account.

There were few of them, because proclaiming such unpopular views and breaking away from the united "front" of the entire nation required enormous civil courage. I consider the widespread belief today that we are a nation of individualists to be one of the most inaccurate opinions about so-called national characteristics. The same is true of the famous saying "where there are two Poles, there are three different opinions."

I always had the impression that it was the other way around. That Poles cannot stand people who have different views than the majority, and woe betide those who try to go their own way. Those who go against the grain are generally considered in our country to be fanatics, renegades, fascists, or even traitors. No matter how strong their arguments are to support their theses, they will still be torn apart by the herd blindly following the guidelines of "authorities." Unfortunately, Poles are a nation that thinks collectively.

This is the case now, and it was also the case in the interwar period. Although Józef Beck pursued a pro-German policy between 1934 and 1939, the idea of rapprochement with our western neighbor was extremely unpopular in Poland. Poles were enamored with our eternal, "faithful" sister France, on whom we could always count, and they thought fondly of Great Britain. It was an alliance with these countries that they dreamed of and longed for.

Although in the 1930s Poland found itself in the worst geopolitical position in the world – between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union – most of the Polish elite did not feel compelled to worry or reflect deeply on the fragility of the state. They believed wholeheartedly in their alliance with France, supposedly “the world’s greatest land power,” and in their own invincible army, which would strike fear into the hearts of the nasty Prussian junkers of the Wehrmacht.

In other words, complete carefreeness and, so characteristic of Poles, bravado and wishful thinking. Complete ignorance of reality in the name of our famous "it'll work out somehow." Here is one telling example. During one of his conversations with Marshal Piłsudski in the mid-1930s, his aide Mieczysław Lepecki expressed the view that "nothing in the world would be permanent if Poland did not gain independence now."

Can you imagine such a thing? If bookmakers had been taking bets at the time on which country in the world was most likely to cease to exist in the near future, they would probably not even have considered Poland. No one except Poles would have bet a penny on it; it wouldn't even have made sense to include it in the bets. One glance at the map was enough to see that the independence so hard-won after 120 years of captivity was literally hanging by a thread.

On one side, the Nazi Reich; on the other, the Soviet Union. The two most expansionist, totalitarian states in the world. And what was Poland doing, squeezed between these two giants? What was its leadership doing in the second half of the 1930s? It was convinced that "everything would be fine" and ruined its relations with both neighbors. The exception breaking away from the carefree

hurray-optimistic moods was the Marshal – more on that later – but also journalists from the conservative camp.

It was among them that geopolitics, a field so poorly understood by most Poles, gained the greatest popularity. They were also the only ones who advocated that Poland should abandon its traditional carefree romantic politics and start practicing Realpolitik.

The question of whether there were people in pre-war Poland who advocated an alliance with Germany should therefore be answered in the affirmative. Although they were marginalized and accused of treason, neo-fascism, and other nonsense (how typically Polish!), they did exist and tried to promote their ideas. These ideas did not stem from any great love for Germany, let alone National Socialism, which these people rightly despised, but were the result of cold calculation and concern for the threatened existence of the state.

I will discuss the most important of the Polish Germanophiles, Władysław Studnicki, in detail at the end of the book. Now, let us take a look at two of his faithful disciples, two borderland nobles and ardent Polish patriots, Stanisław Mackiewicz and Adolf Bocheński. These were courageous Poles who argued in the 1930s that only by relying on Berlin could the Second Polish Republic avoid catastrophe. Although they were not understood by their compatriots, history proved them right.

The first of them, Stanisław Mackiewicz, is much better known. Before the war, this respected writer and political journalist was the editor-in-chief of the conservative daily newspaper Słowo, which represented the interests and views of the Lithuanian landed gentry (the so-called Vilnius bison). Mackiewicz spent the war in exile and served as Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland in 1954–1955. In 1956, he arrived in the People's Republic of Poland under rather unpleasant circumstances, where he died ten years later.

Adolf Bocheński was the most talented representative of the conservative journalists of the younger generation gathered around Bunt Młodych (Youth Rebellion), a magazine published by Jerzy Giedroyc and later renamed Polityka. This group, which also included Aleksander Bocheński, Wacław Zbyszewski, and Mieczysław Pruszyński, among others, brought together supporters of the Polish idea of a superpower.

Bocheński became famous for his book *Między Niemcami a Rosją* (Between Germany and Russia), written in 1937, after reading which even Roman Dmowski reportedly changed his views on our western neighbor. Bocheński fought during the September Campaign, at Narvik, Tobruk, and Monte Cassino. Everywhere he went, he became famous for his incredible courage. In 1944, he was killed while defusing a mine near Ancona.

Both Bocheński and Mackiewicz understood very well that a weak Poland – stripped of its eastern territories as a result of the disastrous Treaty of Riga – had no chance against its two powerful neighbors. That fighting both of them would simply be madness. Especially since there was no hope of any help from the rotten West, consumed by pacifist sentiments.

“Poland’s foreign policy is its attitude towards Germany and Russia,” wrote Stanisław Mackiewicz. “Fate has bound us to these two huge European countries, and our policy is a function of German-Russian relations. When Germany and Russia are on good terms, it spells disaster for Poland; when they are at odds, it strengthens Poland. Poland's importance, position, fortunes, and misfortunes are linked to Germany's attitude toward Russia and Russia's attitude toward Germany."

Recognizing this raised the question: Who to side with – Germany against the Soviet Union, or the Soviet Union against Germany? The latter was obviously out of the question. Such an alliance would have inevitably led to an immediate brutal conquest from within and the Sovietization of Poland. Secondly, Poland had no particular reason to side with the West. It had nothing to gain there. Its western (and northern) border ended in a territory inhabited by a compact element.

German. The idea of mass expulsions of the population of East Prussia or Lower Silesia could only have been conceived in minds that were sick and poisoned by totalitarianism.

The situation in the East was completely different. As we have already mentioned, the Soviets controlled vast areas of the pre-partition Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, inhabited by nations historically associated with it: Belarusians, Ukrainians, Poles, and Jews. According to Mackiewicz, these territories had to be recaptured in order to rebuild Poland's power. Only when it became a regional power could the country build a powerful state structure in the geopolitical space between Germany and Russia. A structure that would allow it to survive.

"The Polish state has no way to expand westward—it can only expand eastward," he wrote. The conclusion was obvious: in order to achieve these goals, it was necessary to reach an agreement with Germany.

"Our official policy has quite rightly taken a pro-German stance," Stanisław Mackiewicz emphasized in 1938. "The inertia of Polish thought finds it difficult to understand that General Żeligowski's Slavic identity is fundamentally anti-Russian, that its main pillar is the desire to break up Russia. And in this way, General Żeligowski's idea is connected with the main idea of our magazine [Słowo], with the pursuit of Polish power. We were the first to proclaim that Poland is destined for greatness, that Poland will not survive as a small country. [That is why we sought] anti-Russian political cooperation with Germany, with offensive goals against Russia.

The theory of Mackiewicz that I would particularly like to draw your attention to is the theory of exotic alliances. Let us listen: "Alliances between countries that are too far apart and unequally powerful are often exotic alliances," he wrote after the Polish-German war of 1939. Alliances are like marriages: it is most natural when people from the same social circle, with similar interests and of similar age, marry. The most natural alliances are those between neighboring countries. If the destruction of one country entails the destruction of another, then the alliance between them has all the characteristics of a natural alliance, not an exotic one.”

And further: “Politically, our alliance with France had certain characteristics of an exotic alliance. France needed us, but the collapse and destruction of the Polish state did not automatically cause the collapse of France. The alliance with France could not be the only security for Poland. On the other hand, the alliance with England was a completely exotic alliance for us. England does not need Poland to exist, it never has. Sometimes it is in its interest to push us against Russia – as before the era of the Great Sejm – sometimes against Germany, sometimes, as in 1939, to direct Hitler's attack against us in order to divert Hitler's blow from itself and turn it against Russia. England builds its foreign policy on the antagonisms between the great European powers. It needs friction between Russia and Germany. The existence of a great Poland would weaken this friction. Therefore, it is in England's interest that Poland should not exist at all, or that it should be as small as possible.

I will return to Stanisław Mackiewicz and his views many times in this book. Let us now take a look at Adolf Bocheński and his *Between Germany and Russia*, one of the most important political books in Polish history, which has been almost completely forgotten. Let us read carefully what this young man, gifted with a brilliant political instinct – he was only twenty-eight when his book went to press – had to say to his nation.

"The foreign policy of all countries is subject to constant change, and the positions of these countries today cannot be taken a priori as immutable," wrote Adolf Bocheński. "One should assume periods of hostile and friendly relations with both of our neighbors. This necessitates not so much protecting the 'good' and fighting the 'bad' as striving to ensure that Poland has the greatest possible strength in general."

in both absolute and relative terms – in relation to both neighbors. Machiavelli wrote that when dealing with a friend, one should never forget that he may be an enemy, and when dealing with an enemy, that he may be a friend.

That is why he proposed to move on from the Polish-German issues of the partition period and focus on the Reich, a country with a decidedly anti-Soviet stance. And, consequently, a community of interests linked to the Republic of Poland.

It is not some "brilliant Polish policy" or anything of the sort, but rather the German-Russian antagonism, dating back in our times to Adolf Hitler's rise to power, that has created today's economic situation, which is so favorable for Poland. The above theoretically implies that if Polish policy wishes to prolong the German-Russian antagonism as long as possible, it should oppose the side that wishes to reach an agreement with its opponent, and strengthen the side that is unyielding and even aggressive. [We should therefore] rather speak out in favor of the German Reich."

Some *passages between Germany and Russia* are downright prophetic. As early as 1937, Adolf Bocheński predicted the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact. A pact whose signing two years later took our foreign minister, Józef Beck, completely by surprise. Bocheński warned that if Germany failed to reach an agreement with Poland, it would have to seek an ally against it, and that ally would be the Soviet Union. As he argued, "it is extremely harmful to delude oneself into thinking that the ideological differences between Hitlerism and communism will prevent these two countries from reaching an agreement."

"An alliance with Poland is the only realistic way for Germany to get into Soviet Russia," he emphasized. "It is difficult to imagine a repeat of the Crimean War and the German army landing from the north, given the hopeless closure of the straits and the position of Great Britain. When public opinion in Poland is absolutely hostile to any possibility of a grand game – i.e., a Polish-German alliance – the chances of success for the Reich's anti-Russian plans diminish to almost zero. Then the specter of a new Rapallo [i.e., an agreement between the Germans and the Soviets] appears on the historical stage.

Hopes for French assistance? Adolf Bocheński left no room for illusions. He argued that as long as the Soviet Union existed in Eastern Europe – which would always be Paris's most desirable ally in the fight against Germany – France would never take us seriously. And it would never help us. We could only become a true partner for France once the Soviets had been destroyed. Otherwise, Paris would abandon us for Moscow without even looking back.

The primary consideration of French raison d'état is to secure the strongest possible ally against Germany [in the East]. As long as that ally is Poland, the Polish-French alliance is unshakeable. However, if it is another country, France will sacrifice Poland for the interests of that country. Let us not delude ourselves. The road to Paris does not lead Poland through the waiting rooms of salons and trips to train stations. It leads along a more circuitous, but greater and more magnificent route. Through Kiev, through Kharkiv and Odessa."

Unfortunately, Józef Beck clearly did not read Bocheński's book carefully and did not heed any of his warnings. He also disregarded Mackiewicz's opinion. As a result, three years after the book was written, there was nothing left between Germany and Russia.

—

Chapter 14

Piłsudski's Secret

Beck repeatedly assured – both before and after the tragic events of September 1939 – that his actions, which led Poland to disaster, were the fulfillment of the Marshal's political will. Until the end of his life, he considered himself his student. However, he was clearly not a very quick learner. Piłsudski was a true statesman, but above all a responsible politician, which cannot be said about Beck.

It is truly difficult to imagine that the Marshal would have so casually and recklessly led Poland into a war which, due to the enormous disparity in strength between the opponents, was bound to end in disaster for the Republic. Although comparing Beck to a figure of Piłsudski's stature seems downright absurd, even today one can hear people say that the Marshal would have done the same thing as Beck in 1939.

"Piłsudski's death, it might seem, would make it easier for Hitler to play games with Poland," wrote Tomasz Łubieński in *1939. It began in September*. "With the charismatic marshal, there would certainly be a lot of problems. All the more so in Berlin, where his death was celebrated." Łubieński even suggested that the official mourning announced in Berlin in 1935 was in fact accompanied by joy and relief. Piłsudski, the father of Polish independence and a politician of great stature, would probably have given Hitler an even more decisive rebuff than Beck.

Let me put forward a completely different hypothesis – that it was the other way around. Piłsudski knew perfectly well the value of independence, he knew how difficult it was to fight for it and how easy it was to lose it. That is why he would have been much more cautious than Beck and would not have recklessly endangered the existence of the Republic of Poland. It is also difficult to accept Łubieński's claim that Hitler actually welcomed Piłsudski's death with relief.

There is no document in the available source material that would confirm this hypothesis. On the contrary, Hitler was certain until the end of his life that if Piłsudski had lived to see 1939, the Polish-German war would not have broken out. Dozens of similar statements by the Führer can be found. For example, let us quote the conversation between the Führer and Bulgarian Prime Minister Bogdan Filov, which took place on January 4, 1941.

"If old Piłsudski were still alive," the leader of the Third Reich said to his guest, "the Polish war would probably not have broken out. Admittedly, under his rule, the Germans did not fare too well in Poland either, but their situation was at least tolerable. It was also possible to reach an agreement with him on Gdańsk, the corridor, and communications with East Prussia. When he closed his eyes, relations in Poland under his successors changed fundamentally."

Here is a report sent by the Polish underground to London: “The already greatly weakened cult of the legend was further undermined by the Germans, who skillfully destroyed the remnants of the smoldering fire of faith in the old ideal with utter perfidy. All they had to do was place honor guards in front of the crypt at Wawel and in front of the Belvedere Palace in Warsaw. Added to this were Hitler's statements that if Piłsudski were alive, then... The same statements were made in speeches by Frank and a number of other leading Nazis, in articles in the German press, etc."

Of course, what Hitler said can be dismissed as the ravings of a madman. One thing is certain, however – he believed what he was saying. If his belief, expressed between 1934 and 1939, that Piłsudski would agree to a settlement with him was indeed a tactical ploy to persuade Beck to make concessions, then continuing this ploy after the war had broken out and the game was over was not

It made sense, after all. Hitler could have dropped the mask by then. Nevertheless, he kept repeating that he would definitely have gotten along with Piłsudski.

Many Poles shared this opinion. “Was it possible for Poland to pursue a different policy before 1939, one that would have changed the course of events?” wrote Jerzy Giedroyc allusively. “Only a fortune teller could answer that question. I suppose that if Marshal Piłsudski had been alive and in full health, he would have sought to delay the outbreak of war. But that is all that can be said on the subject. In any case, there is no doubt that a different policy is always possible; no political decision is the only right one."

In his *History of Poland*, Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz passionately warned: “It can be said that the Marshal took a risk with nine chances against one. In 1939, Rydz did not even have the opposite ratio; he did not have even the slightest chance. It was not a risk, but simply suicide. Those who claim that he would have plunged us into war against Germany and Russia, with only a piece of paper with British promises issued a minute before the war began, are insulting the memory of the Marshal. For the good of Poland, the Marshal was able to endure even humiliation. When he put on a black and yellow armband in 1914, it was the greatest humiliation for him. He endured it to save his concept of Polish independence. During the period of independence, he became even more cautious. I was told that he said in his beloved Vilnius dialect: "Don't go to war without me, you will lose it without me." Poland, regained through the dreams and work of generations, was lost in two weeks. It was not for nothing that at the Mokotów Fields, when the Marshal's coffin stood high on a gun carriage, heavy black clouds emerged from behind it. Thunder and lightning frightened us all.

And further: "Therefore, those who claim that Beck acted as Piłsudski's disciple or pursued Piłsudski's policies are wrongly insulting a man who lies in his coffin and cannot defend himself. If Piłsudski had lived to see 1936 and the years that followed, he would certainly have chosen one of two paths: 1. I do not rule out that he would have joined the Germans in their attack on Soviet Russia; 2. However, it is more likely that, having taken advantage of the temporary pacification of Polish-German relations to strengthen Poland, he would have provoked an anti-German offensive, carefully protecting himself from Russia. But under no circumstances would he have pursued Beck's policy, which consisted of cooperating with Germany in strengthening Germany's position in Central Europe without simultaneously resolving the disputed German-Polish issues, leaving them unresolved, open, and festering. Mackiewicz considered the idea that Piłsudski would go to war with Germany, having only verbal assurances of friendship from the "English princess from across the sea," to be absurd.

In the fall of 1941, Władysław Studnicki wrote directly about the possibility of a closer alliance between Hitler and Piłsudski: “People often ask, especially Germans in conversations with Poles, whether Piłsudski, had he been alive, would have allowed the war with Germany in 1939 to happen. I must answer this question in the negative – he would not have allowed it, because the insignificance of our air force and motorized forces was already known before the war. Piłsudski knew and understood the power of Germany. He would have preferred to have them as allies rather than enemies. Piłsudski would have accepted German suggestions for a joint war against the Soviets. Dictator Hitler constantly needed new exploits – the idea of war with the Soviets preoccupied him. Piłsudski was always close to this idea, appreciating the Russian danger. This idea was at the root of his initiative to sign a pact with Germany in 1934. Piłsudski had so much moral and political credit with the nation that he could accept Hitler's conditions regarding Gdańsk and the highway through Pomerania. Piłsudski would have been able to share the responsibility for the concessions among representatives of all groups. He would have gathered them together, informed them of the state of the German, French, British, and Polish armies, pointed out the Soviet threat, and obtained their approval for the concessions. He could even have avoided them, or postponed them, given their shared intentions regarding Soviet Russia. At the critical moment, we would have had a responsible man in a responsible position. For those who were at the decisive

positions, not only Piłsudski is responsible before history, but all of us who did not fight them.

Some researchers agree with the above hypothesis, including the late Jerzy Krasuski, a specialist in Polish-German relations. "Piłsudski would not have been fundamentally opposed to certain territorial concessions to Germany if this could have brought about a real settlement and allowed him to devote himself entirely to preparing for what he believed to be an inevitable war with the Soviet Union sooner or later," he wrote.

Professor Paweł Wieczorkiewicz emphasized: “It is worth considering at this point whether there was any other option in the situation at that time. Accepting the Führer's demands would have led to the gradual vassalization of Poland, but it would have spared the country the Fourth Partition, the September defeat, and finally the atrocities of both occupations. Such a fundamental reorientation of policy, however, required the support of an authority that neither Beck, Śmigły-Rydz, nor Mościcki possessed." From private conversations with the professor, I know that he also believed that if Piłsudski had been alive, he would have gritted his teeth and entered into a difficult cooperation with Hitler.

Jerzy Łojek put it this way: “Unfortunately, at the turn of 1938 and 1939, there was no political authority in Poland, either in government circles or within the opposition, who – aware of the gravity of the situation and the real threat in the near future – could bring about such a radical reorientation of Polish foreign policy. The only statesman of the interwar period who would have been capable of saving the Republic through a fundamental change in state policy before the outbreak of World War II could have been Józef Piłsudski – and only the Piłsudski of 1920, not the 72-year-old Piłsudski of 1939, worn out by age and ill health, who did not fall victim to cancer in 1935. Unfortunately, the Marshal had been dead for four years, and none of his successors and political heirs had the political talent, insight, and authority – in short, the charisma – necessary to undertake such an attempt to save the Republic at a time of impending disaster.

Unfortunately, Józef Piłsudski died four years before the outbreak of World War II. However, we are familiar with his ideas from World War I, which was fought in a very similar situation and with an almost identical alliance structure to the subsequent conflict. The concepts put forward at that time and implemented by Józef Piłsudski are therefore interesting material for reflection on what he would have done if he had had to decide on whose side Poland would fight in 1939.

Piłsudski outlined his predictions about the coming conflict during a lecture he gave in Paris on February 21, 1914. Extensive notes from this event were taken by Viktor Chernov, a Russian Socialist Revolutionary who was present in the room. "Victory will go from West to East," Piłsudski predicted. "What does this mean? It means that Russia will be defeated by Austria and Germany, and they in turn will be defeated by Anglo-French (or Anglo-American-French) forces. Eastern Europe will be defeated by Central Europe, and Central Europe in turn by Western Europe. This shows Poles the direction of their actions."

As Walery Sławek reported years later, Piłsudski said that such a scenario would be "a simple matter, the most advantageous for us." So what position, according to Piłsudski, should the Poles take towards the war between Germany and the coalition of England, Russia, and France? Of course, they should work towards the aforementioned scenario that was "most advantageous" for them. And so, they should divide their participation in the war into two stages.

This idea of Piłsudski's was clearly expressed by one of his closest associates at the time, Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz. In a conversation with the aforementioned Czernow, he said: "The first phase of the war – we are with the Germans against the Russians. The second and final phase of the war – we are with the British and French against the Germans." When one of his interlocutors at the time

interlocutors that siding with Germany could mean giving up Pomerania, Poznań and Silesia, Piłsudski replied briefly: "Too bad. You have to be realistic."

Piłsudski pursued this tactic with iron consistency during World War I. As long as the Russian colossus existed in the East, he fought against it alongside the Germans and Austrians. However, when Russia ceased to exist as a result of defeats on the front and an internal coup, the Commander immediately made a volte-face, renouncing his allegiance to the Central Powers.

In the first days of July 1917, Piłsudski gathered his officers at the Brühlowski Hotel and said: "Our common path with Germany has come to an end. Russia, our common enemy, has fulfilled its role. Our common interest no longer exists. All our interests and those of Germany are [now] opposed to each other. It is in Germany's interest, above all, to defeat the Allies, and in ours for the Allies to defeat Germany."

I think that these concepts – since you have already reached this point in the book – sound familiar. Yes, my view boils down to the fact that Józef Beck should have implemented Józef Piłsudski's program from World War I during World War II. He should have simply analyzed his policy and repeated it. Divide the war into two phases. In the first, fight the Soviets together with the Germans, and in the second – when the Germans began to lose to the Western powers – break that alliance and fight the Germans. Only such a strategy gave us a chance of victory.

Unfortunately, Beck disregarded the warnings and ideas of the man he considered his mentor. There is no reason to believe that if Piłsudski had lived to see World War II, he would not have tried to implement his strategy from the previous war. After all, this strategy had been successful, and, as I mentioned, World War II was fought under very similar conditions to World War I.

Of course, Marshal Piłsudski would not have been thrilled to cooperate with someone like Adolf Hitler, but this was not about sympathy, but about a sober assessment of the situation. It was about saving Poland. "I trust almost no one, let alone the Germans," he said shortly before his death. "However, I have to play along, because the West is currently in a bad way. If it does not see the light and toughen up soon, we will have to change our approach."

It was precisely this belief in the “rottenness” of the West that underpinned his concept of rapprochement with Germany, which had been pursued since Poland regained its independence. As early as 1922, Piłsudski spoke irritably about “the West kissing the Bolsheviks’ asses.” When Paris signed the Locarno Treaty with Berlin in 1925, which left the question of Germany's western border open, Piłsudski lost all illusions.

"Locarno," wrote historian Tomasz Serwatka, "taught Piłsudski that France was an illoyal, dishonest, and essentially unreliable partner, one that could not be counted on in a dispute with Germany or Russia. Probably already then, on the eve of the May coup and the regaining of power, the Marshal, having learned this bitter lesson, was planning a gradual departure from uncritical reliance on Paris. However, such a policy required a détente with Germany in order to finally end Poland's role as a [petitioner] of the Quai d'Orsay and to prevent the European powers from covering the cost of peace at Poland's expense.

When Józef Piłsudski regained power as a result of the May coup, he did everything he could to make Poland independent from the West. This became the main element of his foreign policy. In a conversation with Alfred Wysocki, the future Polish ambassador to Berlin, he stated that it was necessary to move away from the pre-May practices of "kissing up to the gentlemen in Paris or London."

The Marshal considered this ass-kissing not only humiliating, but also pointless. He was certain that in the event of war between Germany and Poland, Paris would not lift a finger in our defense. On October 24, 1932, the Marshal received the French military attaché, Colonel

Christian d'Arbonneau. In conversation with him, he described Paris' policy towards Warsaw as "deplorable." "France will abandon us, France will betray us!" he declared to the embarrassed Frenchman.

Six months later, on April 22, 1934, Piłsudski received Jean-Louis Barthou, then head of French diplomacy, at the Belvedere Palace. The following conversation took place between the two men:

"We've had enough of these concessions. The Germans must feel that we will not give an inch," argued the Frenchman.

– "You will give in, gentlemen, you will give in, you would not be yourselves.

– How can you accuse us of that, Mr. Marshal!

– You may not want to step down, but in that case you will either resign or be overthrown in parliament," replied Piłsudski, adding that he was very pleased with the German-Polish détente.

Piłsudski decided to cozy up to Berlin not because he was some Germanophile. Not because he liked Germans or Hitler. He did it because he didn't believe France, with its pacifist spirit, would help. As the tragic events of September 1939 showed, he was right. It is really hard to believe that the Marshal would have gone to war with Germany, insuring himself with ridiculous alliances with the French or the British.

Mieczysław Pruszyński, Ksawery's brother and Adolf Bocheński's colleague at the magazine Bunt Młodych (Rebellion of the Young), was also convinced that Piłsudski would have made a difficult compromise with Hitler. During the war, he fought at Narvik and Tobruk, and later bombed the Third Reich while serving in the 305th Bomber Squadron named after Marshal Józef Piłsudski. He was awarded the Virtuti Militari and four Crosses of Valor. He was an outstanding social activist. He died in 2005 in Warsaw.

In the mid-1990s, Pruszyński published a book in Warsaw entitled *Tajemnica Piłsudskiego* (The Secret of Piłsudski), in which he meticulously analyzed the Marshal's actions and geopolitical concepts, as well as his statements and conversations on Poland's place in Europe in the 1930s. Based on this enormous source material, he announced that he had deciphered Piłsudski's secret. I don't think I need to tell you what that secret was.

"In my studies on the role of Józef Piłsudski in the war of 1920," wrote Mieczysław Pruszyński in the introduction to this book, "I came across a statement he made in May 1934 in a conversation with the then Prime Minister Janusz Jędrzejewicz: ‘Oh, my generals. What will they do with Poland after my death?’ He repeated these words a second and third time,” wrote Jędrzejewicz. "I cannot repeat the Marshal's further words. I sat there, distraught and terrified." These further words spoken in the presence of Prime Minister Jędrzejewicz, and repeated in the presence of Minister Beck after the signing of the non-aggression pact with Germany, were found in the account of Wiktor Tomir Drymmer, Beck's trusted associate: "They want war with Germany, even those stupid, uneducated, and lazy generals... They don't understand anything... Where am I supposed to wage this war? ... In Saxon Square? ... Generals," he repeated, "don't learn, don't know anything, but they want war."

In *Tajemnica Piłsudskiego (The Secret of Piłsudski)*, Pruszyński reconstructs the great game that the Marshal undertook shortly before his death. It all began in 1933, when, after Hitler came to power, he approached the French with a proposal for a preventive war against Germany, having secured his position with an agreement with the Soviets in 1932. At that moment, such an expedition still had an almost 100% chance of success.

The Polish Army alone was several times larger than the Reichswehr, being able to field thirty divisions against seven German ones. When the French, terrified by such a proposal, decisively rejected it, Piłsudski decided to renew the offer in the fall of 1933 in order to be completely certain about his western "ally." He sent his trusted man, former legionnaire Count Ludwik Morstin, to Paris.

"Listen, Ludwik," he said to him before his departure, "I am sending you as plenipotentiary minister and extraordinary ambassador of the Government of the Republic of Poland to the Government of the Republic of France to ask the Government of the Republic of France the following questions: if Germany attacks Poland on any section of its borders, will France respond with a general mobilization of all its armed forces, and will it deploy all its available armed forces on the German border in this case? I expect a clear, unambiguous answer: yes or no. I will not accept any promises of assistance in the form of staff, ammunition, weapons, or organizing world public opinion in favor of Poland, etc., only yes or no."

Morstin immediately went to Paris, where he stayed with an old friend from the Polish-Bolshevik War, General Maxime Weygand. With his help, he contacted the French government. The answer to the Marshal's question was negative for the second time. In the event of a German attack on Poland, France replied, we will not order any mobilization. Nor will we station troops on the German border. Paris promised, however, "assistance in military headquarters, armaments and ammunition, and the widest possible mobilization of world public opinion in favor of Poland."

When Morstin returned to Warsaw and conveyed the French response to Piłsudski, the Marshal listened calmly without asking a single question. After Morstin had finished his report, Piłsudski turned to Józef Beck, who was present in the room, and said: "Well, let Lipski go to Berlin to make a non-aggression pact."

At that moment, it became clear to Piłsudski what Józef Beck never understood until the end of his life. Namely, that Poland could not count on any help from the Western Allies. Therefore, in order to secure its independence, it could not rely on distant France or Great Britain, but simply had to come to an agreement with Germany. Unfortunately, all the misfortunes that befell Poland after 1939 were the result of Beck's simple gawking. If he had listened more carefully to his mentor, all of this could have been avoided.

Józef Piłsudski considered the pact signed with Germany on January 26, 1934, to be the most important event in the short history of the Second Polish Republic since the signing of the Treaty of Versailles.

"Why did Piłsudski agree to a pact with Hitler? He agreed because he understood that war with Germany would mean the end of the Polish state, because France would not help us, and Stalin would take advantage of the opportunity to avenge 1920 and stab us in the back," wrote Mieczysław Pruszyński. "Naive in their perfidy, the governments of France and Great Britain did not want to risk war with Germany themselves. However, they would have liked to see Russia at war with Germany. The fact that the Soviets would have devoured Poland at that time would not have mattered much to Mr. Eden and other Western diplomats."

A few weeks after concluding the agreement with Adolf Hitler, Józef Piłsudski convened a special meeting at the Belvedere Palace with the participation of President Mościcki, former prime ministers Kazimierz Bartel, Walery Sławek, Aleksander Prystor, Kazimierz Świtalski – and the incumbent Prime Minister Jędrzej Jędrzejewicz. Foreign Minister Józef Beck also joined this group. According to later accounts, the Marshal was in an excellent mood.

It was during this conversation that Piłsudski uttered the most important words he ever said to his colleagues: "Poland's task lies in the East; perhaps Poland can seize the opportunity to become an influential factor in the East. We should neither interfere nor attempt to influence relations between Western countries!" Indeed, it is difficult not to ask what Beck was doing when these words were spoken. Did he just go to the bathroom, fall asleep, or perhaps simply become lost in thought, staring out the window? One thing is certain: these words did not reach him.

The Marshal made it clear that, given the inability to rely on Western democratic countries, Poland should turn away from that part of the continent and focus on the East. The pact with Germany was supposed to give Poland a free hand and gain a powerful ally to

realize the Marshal's great dream. What he failed to achieve in 1920 – namely, to crush the Soviets and create a powerful Polish-Ukrainian-Belarusian federation stretching from sea to sea under the auspices of Warsaw.

His statement, made during a conversation with General Kazimierz Fabrycy, about the agreements he signed with the Soviets and Germans in 1932 and 1934, is famous. "Gentlemen, we are sitting on two stools. This cannot last long. We need to know which one we will fall off first and when," said the Marshal.

It is no secret that Piłsudski was very concerned about what would happen to Poland after his death. One could even venture to say that it became his obsession. Unfortunately, his thoughts and predictions were extremely pessimistic. In 1931, Colonel Roman Michałowski, then military attaché at our embassy in Bucharest, witnessed the following scene, which took place during the Marshal's vacation in Romania: "During one of my night shifts, I dozed off, and when I woke up, I heard the Marshal's voice. Impressed by the fact that, despite the strict prohibition on allowing anyone into the Marshal's room without the prior consent of the doctors, someone had entered the room while I was napping, I automatically opened the bedroom door, which the Marshal noticed as he sat opposite the door playing solitaire. Apparently lost in thought, which I interrupted with my appearance, he asked:

– What do you want, boy?

Before I could explain why I was disturbing his peace, the Marshal, looking me straight in the eye, continued his monologue:

– Yes, are you aware of the dangers threatening Poland, from outside and inside...? What will happen when I am gone... who can look reality straight in the eye... If Poles, all Poles, understand what I am saying, all Poles, do not get down to work to defend the interests of the country, and I am gone, then in ten years Poland will be no more...

The Marshal threw his cards on the table, covered his face with his arms spread wide, and seemed to sob.

Let us repeat once again Jędrzejewicz's recollection of his conversation with the Marshal in May 1934: "I sat down. The Marshal's face, hitherto gentle and smiling, suddenly changed. His features slumped, the dense network of wrinkles became more pronounced, and from under his bushy, bushy eyebrows, eyes tired with worry or anxiety looked at me, the eyes of a man suffering and oppressed. It was not bitterness or regret that shone through them, but uncertainty and fear. Until the end of my life, I will never forget the expression on that pained and tired face I saw before me at that moment. After a long moment of silence, I heard him whisper: "Ah, my generals. What will they do with Poland after my death?" He repeated these words a second and third time – he, the most far-sighted, who had stood guard over Poland for so many years, the commander of the army, the spiritual leader of the nation, who had devoted his entire life to Poland and Poland alone. I cannot repeat the Marshal's further words. I sat there, stunned and terrified. There are moments when other people's experiences, fears, anxieties, and uncertainties penetrate deep into a person's soul, when someone else's pain and anxiety become one's own pain and anxiety. What I sensed, what I understood at that moment, when a wave of pure human understanding connected my thoughts and feelings with his thoughts and feelings, was so dangerous, so terrible, that I could not utter a word. I could not deny it; it would have been futile to offer comfort.

In *Tajemnica Piłsudskiego (The Secret of Piłsudski),* Mieczysław Pruszyński pointed to the decisive elements of his biography. His borderland origins, his upbringing during the post-uprising repressions of Muravyov

The "hangman," revolutionary work, exile to Siberia, the Polish Military Organization, fighting Russia in the Legions alongside the Central Powers, and finally the war with the Bolsheviks in 1920. All this made Russia, whether red or white, appear to him as "the worst enemy of Polish independence." It was Russia that was enemy number one, posing the greatest threat to the Republic.

“In Poland’s increasingly difficult external situation – between two neighbors constantly expanding their armed forces – Piłsudski considered every year of peace with Germany to be precious, because it ensured Poland’s existence,” wrote Mieczysław Pruszyński. "The nation did not understand this and lived without concern for the future of the state, deluded at every opportunity that Poland was a superpower. Nor did the generals understand this, who, rattling their sabers, expressed criticism of the pact concluded with Germany."

*The author of Tajemnica Piłsudskiego (*The Secret of Piłsudski) drew attention to an article written by his brother before the war. In it, Ksawery Pruszyński wrote about the "loneliness" suffered by Piłsudski in Poland. Unlike the general population, the Marshal was "unfamiliar with the pan-Slavic, pro-Soviet, anti-Semitic, anti-Ukrainian sentiments and hatred of the 'German hydra' that were sweeping the country at the time." Mrs. Piłsudska wrote in her diary that "The war with Germany was a nightmare that tormented my husband constantly."

Let us give the floor to Mieczysław Pruszyński: “The conviction that the only guarantee of Poland’s existence was friendly relations with Germany, and that war with Germany would mean the end of Poland, was Piłsudski’s secret, which, for obvious reasons, he could not reveal even to those closest to him. Piłsudski was undoubtedly tormented by the awareness that Poland's days were numbered and that neither the nation nor his closest associates were aware of this, and he could not warn them. That is why he treated his generals, who did not understand this, so harshly."

Mieczysław Pruszyński ended *Tajemnica* Piłsudskiego (The Secret of Piłsudski) with a description of Walery Sławek's suicide. I will quote a longer excerpt from this book:

Walery Sławek was Piłsudski's oldest, most loyal, and closest political associate. After Piłsudski's death, removed from power by Mościcki and Śmigły-Rydz, on April 2, 1939, Sławek took his own life with the revolver he had used in combat in 1906–1908. He committed suicide at 8:45 p.m., the same time at which his beloved Commander had ended his life. On his desk, next to an engraving depicting Prince Józef's leap into the Elster River, lay a note: "Let no one look for the guilty!"

In the more than half a century that has passed since that day, various reasons for Sławek's suicide have been sought. All of them seem irrelevant. However, Bogusław Miedziński's opinion, who saw a connection between Sławek's death and the approaching war, is correct. Miedziński pointed out that Sławek committed suicide after the British government gave Poland guarantees, "at the moment of Beck's departure for London, with the aim not only of accepting but also developing these guarantees into a bilateral alliance, which, as we know, Hitler treated as a casus belli. Given the close friendship between Sławek and Beck, he must have known about all these matters... He saw the impending moment of fate for Poland and had no place for himself, could not see it, could not feel it."

Beck's secretary, Paweł Starzeński, noted in his memoirs that a few days before Beck's departure for London, Walery Sławek visited the Becks in the evening for a game of bridge. "This time, there was no bridge. Sławek shut himself in with the minister and talked to him for a long time." The conversation must have been dramatic. Beck undoubtedly announced that he would be leaving for London in two days to convert the unilateral guarantee given to Poland by the British government into a normal bilateral alliance. Sławek was certainly of the opinion that such an alliance, obviously directed against Germany, would lead to war between Poland and Germany, which the Commander had warned against until the last day of his life.

Beck probably replied that the situation had changed, because if he, Beck, formed an alliance with such a powerful nation as Great Britain, which Piłsudski had dreamed of unsuccessfully, then Poland's fate would be secure. They parted ways without convincing each other. Perhaps, however, Sławek deluded himself into thinking that Beck would give up his trip, impressed by his arguments? When 2

On April 1, he learned that Beck had left for London at noon, and in the evening he took his own life. For him, this trip meant war with Germany, and thus the end of Poland.

He took Piłsudski's secret with him to the grave..."

At this point, it is worth noting the speculation that has been circulating for years that Sławek's death was related to his attempted coup d'état. The coup was intended to remove Beck, Mościcki, and Śmigły-Rydz from power, as they were pushing Poland towards disaster. The new government was to be formed by Sławek, General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, former Prime Minister Leon Kozłowski, and PPS member Kazimierz Pużak, among others. The aim of the coup was, of course, to prevent Poland's "pro-British turn" and its decision to reach an agreement with Hitler.

This matter was described in detail in 2004 in Newsweek by Dariusz Baliszewski, a well-known popularizer of history and author of the program "Rewizja Nadzwyczajna" (Extraordinary Review). Among other things, he obtained the account of Judge Ignacy Wielgus of the talks held in May 1939 with "well-informed and well-connected" generals Marian Kukiel and Stanisław Haller. According to them, the conspirators intended to elect Sławek as president.

General Sosnkowski, who was in conflict with Śmigły-Rydz, played a huge role in the whole affair. He believed – and rightly so! – that he should have become commander-in-chief after the Marshal's death. “General – wrote Baliszewski – convinced Walery Sławek of the need to reach an agreement with Germany and avoid armed conflict, for which Poland was not prepared. From the facts revealed by both generals [it appears that] the assassination was to take place through an attempt to poison Mościcki.”

However, the matter came to light and, in order to avoid embarrassment, Sławek shot himself in the head, or, according to another version, was shot. This theory is confirmed by the will of the president's wife, Maria Mościcka, who died in 1979. It allegedly contained a reference to the fact that an attempt had indeed been made on Mościcki's life in the early months of 1939. The president was reportedly convinced at the time that Sławek was behind the whole affair.

It all sounds very fantastic. As Baliszewski himself admitted, "the weakness of these hypotheses is that they cannot be verified in the light of available documents." There is another weakness. A great many people must have known about the alleged coup, and – knowing the talkativeness and indiscretion of Poles – everything would surely have come to light long ago. The version that Walery Sławek shot himself because his planned coup was exposed is therefore very unlikely.

It is very likely that he shot himself in protest against Beck's policy, which, in his opinion, contradicted Piłsudski's guidelines. It is known that one of the former BBWR activists – the case was described in Rzeczpospolita by historical journalist Tomasz Stańczyk – met with Walery Sławek a few days before his suicide.

The aforementioned Sanation activist understood that the Rydz–Beck–Mościcki team was betraying the Marshal's will and pushing Poland into the abyss. So he told Sławek that all of Poland was looking to him and expecting him to save the day. Sławek reportedly exploded: "What do you want?! For me to stage a coup?!"

On the day he took his own life, he met with two people who were politically close to him. It was probably during this conversation that he revealed the reason for his suicide. From Sławek Bogdan Podoski's hour-long monologue, he wrote down only these words: "I know it, I feel it, that they are leading Poland to ruin, and I no longer know how to react to it." Podoski's comment was as follows: "The colonel was well aware that Poland was threatened with invasion by Nazi Germany, which was much stronger militarily than Poland. By committing suicide, he wanted to shake the conscience of those in power and persuade them to adapt their foreign and domestic policies to the threat hanging over Poland."

As Tomasz Stańczyk emphasized, this can be understood as a clear suggestion that Walery Sławek – the most loyal of Piłsudski's comrades – considered the policy of confrontation with Germany to be insane and was in favor of concessions to Berlin that would prevent disaster.

Chapter 15

The Pact of January 26

Let us return to 1933, the year in which the Third Reich was born. Adolf Hitler achieved an excellent election result and on January 30, he was appointed chancellor by President Paul von Hindenburg. Piłsudski then instructed Józef Beck to immediately explore whether an agreement between Poland and the new Reich government was indeed possible. The foreign minister's response was positive.

During a long discussion, Piłsudski and Beck came to the following conclusions (listed in his Last Report, dictated during his internment in Romania):

"a) the National Socialist movement undoubtedly has the character of a revolutionary movement;

b) all reformers of the world tend to start the history of their nation anew – from the year "Roman I" – and therefore it is possible to engage in a new discussion with them on old topics;

c) Every reformer of internal life, and Hitler presented himself as such, needs a certain amount of external peace and quiet.

d) Hitler himself was more Austrian than Prussian. It was also striking that there was not a single Prussian among his closest associates. This fact also created a new situation, as the tradition of old Prussia undoubtedly played a decisive role in the anti-Polish fury.

All this, according to the Marshal and his minister, gave the Republic of Poland a chance to overcome the problems it had had with previous German governments that were unfavorable to it.

The effects were not long in coming. On January 26, 1934, Poland and Germany signed a non-aggression pact, officially known as the Declaration between Poland and Germany on the Non-Use of Force, which was to remain in force for ten years. This was a breakthrough which, as Józef Beck put it, was "one of the most radical changes in European politics since the war." In this case, it is difficult to disagree with the head of Polish diplomacy.

“Poland was still waging a quasi-war with Germany,” wrote Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz, “a country much stronger than ours. Finally, it made peace with them, or rather a ceasefire. This must have strengthened it immeasurably. Only now did we and the world feel that we had a population of 35 million, a large army, and a hard-working people of unparalleled patriotism. Poland's importance immediately increased by the entire weight and significance of the difference between war and peace. Beck, from a minister who waited on others, became a minister who was awaited in Europe.

The main aim was to break Poland's burdensome dependence on France. For Paris, the Polish-German conflict was extremely beneficial. Constantly threatened by Germany, the Republic of Poland was forced to seek protection from France, which placed Poland in the position of a supplicant or even a vassal. By concluding an agreement with Berlin, Warsaw went from being an object in the European power game to becoming a subject. "The period of clientelism is over once and for all," wrote Polish diplomat Anatol Mühlstein.

Beck shared a similar opinion: “The exploitation of tense Polish-German relations by third countries in order to settle their own disputes with Germany at Poland’s expense put Poland in a very difficult situation,” he said in 1935 at a conference in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building. And he left no doubt as to what had enabled this dramatic change in the situation.

Republic of Poland – it was a pact with Berlin concluded on January 26, 1934. "The normalization of our relations with Germany became possible thanks to Hitler's revolution," he added.

However, the most important benefit of concluding a pact with Hitler was Germany's break with the Rapallo policy, i.e., the alliance with the Bolsheviks aimed at Poland. Until Hitler came to power, relations between Germany and the Soviet Union had been extremely close. Staff officers from both armies openly discussed the need to carry out a fourth partition of Poland and wipe the "bastard of the Treaty of Versailles" off the map.

That is, the realization of the R+N scenario, which caused terror in Poland. A scenario that Józef Piłsudski feared most and rightly considered to be the most disastrous arrangement in international politics for Poland, deadly for the Republic in the long term. Poland was not in a position to wage war on two fronts; it could not afford to have two powerful mortal enemies on both sides of its borders. Poland had to reach some kind of modus vivendi with one of them. The Soviets were obviously out of the question, so the opportunity arose when Adolf Hitler, who was anti-communist and pro-Polish, became Chancellor of Germany.

As early as the fall of 1933, Germany closed its secret Reichswehr bases in the Soviet Union, and military cooperation was severed. The détente with Poland was accompanied by the onset of a cold war with Bolshevism. Poland's security thus increased enormously. From then on – until the Polish-German break in the spring of 1939 – the Führer firmly rejected all advances made to him by Moscow. Stalin had been striving for an alliance with the Reich long before talks aimed at signing the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact began.

For example, in 1936, during a visit to London for the funeral of King George V, Soviet Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky used "secret channels" to propose "the closest possible cooperation" to the German command. Of course, this was aimed at the Republic of Poland. The offer was decisively rejected by Hitler himself, who was guided by his "unwavering loyalty to Poland." Hermann Göring immediately informed the Polish ambassador, Józef Lipski, about the matter.

A year earlier, in June 1935, the then Polish ambassador to Moscow reported to Warsaw that the Soviets were ready to reach an agreement with Berlin, but that such an alliance was out of the question because the Führer was not interested in it.

“On the basis of concrete evidence, I had reason to consider [Hitler] in 1934 as a rare example of common sense in foreign policy in Germany,” Beck wrote in 1939. He emphasized that as late as 1938, it was still possible to “talk sensibly about European politics” with Hitler. According to our minister, the Führer was supposed to be the first German leader since Bismarck to attempt to pursue a moderate course on the international stage.

On November 24, 1933, in a conversation with a French diplomat, Józef Piłsudski openly stated that he "believed in the sincerity of Hitler, the man most capable of changing the methods and mentality that the Reich government had inherited from the Prussians. He is not rigid like them; he comes from the people. He wants an alliance (this is how Piłsudski explained the word *Anschluss*) with Austria. I would very much like him to remain in power for as long as possible."

On January 31, 1934, a few days after signing the pact with Germany, Kazimierz Świtalski noted that Piłsudski said with a smile: "If Hitler had not come, many things would not have worked out."

The Polish position boiled down to the following statement, which today, after the experiences of World War II, seems shocking: "Hitler's government is the only one among all German governments with which we could reach such an agreement. It is

it is also the most favorable combination for us out of all the possible government combinations in Germany. It could be replaced either by the Junkers or the Communists.

At a meeting with Józef Beck, which took place on July 3, 1935, during the Polish foreign minister's visit to Germany, Hitler declared his "utmost confidence" in Poland. "From the moment I gained influence over the German government, I immediately put forward two points as the most important, even though they were so unpopular in Germany at the time: establishing relations with England and Poland. The rest is secondary," the Führer told the head of Polish diplomacy, adding that the main target of his future expansion was the Soviet Union. That is why Poland's favor was invaluable to him. In his *Last Report*, Beck noted that the way Hitler wanted to express his sympathy was downright grotesque. When greeting him, he shook the hand of the head of Polish diplomacy for too long, and during the conversation he stared passionately into his eyes.

Poland benefited not only politically and economically (end of the customs war) from the Polish-German détente. The burning issue of minorities in both countries was finally resolved. Germans in Poland, but especially Poles in Germany, could finally breathe freely. As Tomasz Łubieński recalled, one of the leading leaders of the German minority at the time called Hitler "the most devoted and selfless friend of the Polish nation."

The friendly atmosphere that prevailed between Poland and the Reich at that time is described in the book *Polska i Polacy w propagandzie narodowego socjalizmu 1919–1945* (Poland and Poles in National Socialist Propaganda 1919–1945) by Eugeniusz Cezary Król, quoted above. After signing the pact with Poland, as if by magic, the German press, which had been anti-Polish until then, announced that the Republic of Poland was "no longer a seasonal state" but a solid ally of the Reich on which Germany could rely. From then on, newspapers, radio broadcasts, and newsreels began to portray Poland as a well-organized, powerful state with a strong army and a friendly population.

Even before the pact was signed, on December 2, 1933, a
a Germany-Poland "friendship match" in soccer. The game was watched by over 30,000 fans, and Józef Lipski and Joseph Goebbels sat side by side in the stands. Unfortunately, we lost 1:0, but German newspapers continued to write in superlatives about the Polish team, describing it as the strongest Germany had ever played against.

Newspapers published caricatures, which this time did not depict Poles as drunks in pointed caps waving sabers or lice bloated from drinking German blood. Now we were portrayed as brave soldiers with regular features. The widespread opinion in Germany about the beauty of Polish women was also used. In his book, Eugeniusz Cezary Król described a series of very characteristic drawings from that period.

For example, one that appeared on July 28, 1935, in Kladderadatsch magazine under the title "Overcoming Prejudices." Standing side by side – clearly friends – are Michel, symbolizing Germany, wearing a pointed cap, and a pretty girl with a red jug bearing the White Eagle, symbolizing Poland, of course. They are feeding a dog and a cat from a single bowl, and a French rooster is trying to disturb this idyll by crowing loudly.

On February 17, 1935, the same magazine published a drawing entitled "Hunting in Poland." It depicted Hermann Göring – the cartoonist slimmed him down by a good thirty kilograms – in hunting attire and with a rifle, lurking in a snow-covered Polish forest, waiting for a wolf. Above Göring, two eagles circle side by side: a black German eagle and a white Polish eagle. "The eagles are protected, and we will go [together] after the wolves," reads the caption, which seems to allude to a joint military expedition to the East.

Eagles were a regular feature in German press cartoons of that period. These powerful birds, symbolizing Poland and Germany, would entwine their necks or eat from the same plate. In one caricature, however, a German cartoonist used a dove of peace with the Polish emblem on one wing and a swastika on the other. Piłsudski also often appeared in drawings of the time, depicted as a powerful figure watching over Poland and Polish-German friendship.

Even in the 1920s, the NSDAP press sometimes referred to the Marshal as an unpredictable paranoid who favored Jews and Freemasons. Now, the same press wrote about him only as the "educator of his nation" or the "great victor of 1920." Several books about the Marshal, which were extremely popular in Germany and, of course, hagiographic, were also published. Particular emphasis was placed on the fact that during the Great War he allied himself with the Central Powers and that he hated Soviet Russia.

Books that portrayed Poland in a negative light were blacklisted and banned from publication. This was the case, for example, with Paul Linser's revisionist publication on the Pomeranian Corridor and a similar book by Manfred von Killing on Silesia. Friedrich Wilhelm Oertzen was also able to print another edition of his famous work *Das ist* Polennie.

Interestingly, even Alfred Rosenberg, a leading expert on race and ideologist of the NSDAP, had to make significant revisions before the next edition of his book *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*. It was the most important National Socialist book after *Mein Kampf* . Known for his aversion to Poles in the 1920s ("mortal enemies," "racially impure people," "Polacks," "biologically underdeveloped," and so on), he now had to remove all anti-Polish remarks from his book.

What is more, he and his colleagues began – in all seriousness – to develop a "racial-biological work plan for the restoration of historical and contemporary ties between Poles and Germans." Appropriately selected illustrative material was to emphasize the "racial pride" of Poles and erase the impression of their "inferiority." Unfortunately, it is not known what these absurd studies yielded. However, the case is very characteristic.

At the same time, contemporary Polish writers were translated and published in large numbers. These included Zofia Nałkowska, Ferdynand Goetl, Józef Weyssenhoff, Henryk Sienkiewicz, Antoni Ossendowski, Michał Choromański, Kazimierz Wierzyński, Maria Dąbrowska, and Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski. The latter undertook a long journey through the Reich in 1935, during which he met with readers. Janusz Korczak was even published in Germany. Young German readers were able to read *Der Bankrott des kleinen Jack* (*The Bankruptcy of Little Jack*), even though the author of the book was of Jewish origin.

Germans went crazy over Polish actress Pola Negri, who was admired by the Führer himself. When Goebbels reported that she was Jewish, Hitler dismissed it. Jan Kiepura was also hugely popular in Germany. Photographs have survived from his recital, which took place in Berlin on February 25, 1935, and was intended to mark the establishment of the German-Polish Institute.

In the front row, Polish diplomats and leading figures of the Third Reich – including Goebbels and Göring – with their spouses in evening attire. One of the photos shows Kiepura leaning over from the stage after his performance, talking to an enthusiastic Goebbels. Similar photos from receptions, balls, wreath-laying ceremonies, performances, and official meetings between leaders of the Third Reich and the Second Polish Republic can be found in Polish and German archives.

In November 1937, Göring organized the International Hunting Art Exhibition in Berlin. Among others, paintings by Polish masters were exhibited there: Kossak, Józef Chełmoński, Józef Brandt, Aleksander Gierymski, and others. After a thorough evaluation of all the works on display, the Grand Hunter of the Reich awarded the first prize to... yes, you guessed it... Poland, of course. In 1938, an exhibition of German sculptors was held in Warsaw and Krakow, featuring busts of Piłsudski, sculpted by Josef Thorak, and Hitler, sculpted by Arno Breker.

Goebbels forbade the Third Reich press from writing about the problems faced by the German minority in Poland. The blame for all the friction in Gdańsk was to be placed not on Poland, but on

the League of Nations Commissioner. At the same time, Poles in Germany were granted Aryan status and thus enjoyed full civil rights. Alongside the Danes, their situation in the Reich was the best among all minorities.

In May 1935, a delegation of the Polish Army led by General Kutrzeba visited Wehrmacht facilities, including the battleship *Deutschland*. Polish officers laid flowers at the monument to German soldiers who died in World War I, which was enthusiastically reported by the Third Reich press. In June, the ships *Wicher* and *Burza* arrived in Kiel on a courtesy visit. A photo reportage of this event was later published in four issues of the Völkischer Beobachter.

In Dresden, the 125th anniversary of Fryderyk Chopin's birth was celebrated with great fanfare. A plaque dedicated to him was unveiled by the Mayor of Warsaw, Stefan Starzyński. Joint film productions began, such as *August der Starke* (*August the Strong*), which emphasized Polish-Saxon ties. The German film industry began to take a liking to making sensational and romantic films in which Poles (more often Polish women) played positive roles. One example is the extremely popular *Prussian Love Affair*.

Goebbels, Göring, Ribbentrop, Himmler, and other German dignitaries regularly visited Poland. In February 1939, during a visit by Prince Karl Eduard von Sachsen-Coburg und Gotha, president of the German Veterans' Association, a funny situation arose. The prince ordered himself to be driven to Warsaw's Nalewki Street in full SA Standartenführer uniform with a swastika on his arm, causing a sensation among the residents of this part of the city. As luck would have it, the German guest stopped in front of a school from which a group of children had just poured out. Intrigued by the picturesque figure, they surrounded the guest with shouts. "It was a striking sight to see an SA dignitary smiling and stroking the heads of Jewish children in Warsaw," described Jan Meysztowicz, who accompanied the prince as a representative of our Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

There was also an increase in contacts at the level of youth organizations. As Eugeniusz Cezary Król writes, the Hitler Youth and its female section, the Bund Deutscher Mädel, organized camps in Poland. Conversely, Polish scouts traveled to the Reich. For example, in 1937, the German press eagerly reported how a troop from the Polish Scouting Association visited Berlin and the Rhineland, and then pitched their tents at a Hitler Youth camp near Frankfurt am Main. Of course, this provided an opportunity for fraternization and joint activities and games organized by members of both organizations.

"From the spring of 1934, Polish and German writers, scientists, and artists visited each other," wrote Eugeniusz Cezary Król. "Students and representatives of youth organizations. Regional and central politicians, specialists in various fields of economics, athletes from numerous disciplines, as well as groups of residents from border areas and members of the Roman Catholic Church."

Bogusław Drewniak wrote more extensively about this incredibly lively cultural cooperation in his book *Polsko-niemieckie zbliżenie w kręgu kultury 1919–1939* (Polish-German Rapprochement in the Sphere of Culture 1919–1939). To avoid prolonging this topic, I will give just one more example. At the beginning of 1935, a film *entitled Chopin, Singer of Freedom* was commissioned by the German authorities.

It was a story about an outstanding Polish composer interwoven with the Polish nation's struggle for freedom against the Tsarist regime in the 19th century. The message of the film was clear. Poland and Germany have a common enemy in the East and must join forces to bring it to its knees and finally remove this danger from Europe. Before the Polish premiere, the filmmakers organized a special closed screening for the Marshal at the Belweder Palace. When it hit Polish cinemas, it received enthusiastic reviews from the Sanation press.

It is also worth mentioning here the famous visits to Poland by Hermann Göring, the Grand Hunter of the Third Reich. It was he whom Hitler entrusted with the task of "winning over the Poles."

An exhaustive article on these hunts was recently written and published in Białystok's Kurier Poranny. Göring, then Prime Minister of nearby Prussia, hunted in Białowieża four times. The idea to invite him came from Józef Lipski, the Polish ambassador in Berlin.

Göring hunted in Poland for the first time on February 28 and 29, 1935. He was accompanied by, among others, President Ignacy Mościcki, Senate Marshal and later President Władysław Raczkiewicz, Generals Kazimierz Sosnkowski and Kazimierz Fabrycy. According to Bajko, Göring's first hunt in Białowieża was unsuccessful. He only managed to bag two wild boars and wounded a wolf, but failed to shoot his dream lynx.

Generals Sosnkowski and Fabrycy, who were then at the helm of the Polish Union of Hunting Associations, awarded the German dignitary the highest Polish hunting decoration, the "Złom," to "compensate" him for his failure. Göring was so delighted that he later came to the forest every year for representative hunts organized in February – in 1936, 1937, and 1938. These visits were full of lavish parties and mutual courtesies.

For example, Göring gave Mościcki a Hanoverian bloodhound hunting dog and... a magnificent Mercedes-Benz hunting car. In 1936, President Mościcki awarded him the Order of the White Eagle. However, as Bojko writes, this was carefully erased from history, and Göring's name is nowhere to be found on the list of recipients of this award today.

All this happened against the views of a large part of the German nation, which – fed for fifteen years with aggressive anti-Polish propaganda – did not, to put it mildly, like its eastern neighbor. Hitler's pro-Polish turn met with particular resistance among Prussian junkers, traditionally conservative diplomatic circles, and the Reichswehr officer corps. For all these groups, reconciliation with Poland was what reconciliation with Germany was for the Polish National Democrats of the time.

When Hitler first delivered his pro-Polish speech in the Reichstag in 1933, he was unable to control the reactions of the deputies, who whistled, stamped their feet, and made it clear to him what they thought about "sucking up to the Polacks."

Hitler's friendly Polenpolitik was not accepted even within his own party, many of whose members and activists were anti-Polish. We know, for example, the content of a conversation between Albert Forster, the Gauleiter of Gdańsk, who hated Poles, and Carl Jakob Burckhardt, the High Commissioner of the League of Nations in Gdańsk. It took place when relations between the Reich and the Republic of Poland had already begun to deteriorate.

"Until now, my policy has been hampered by the fact," Forster argued, "that the Führer felt a purely personal and not entirely objective sympathy for this nation, which separates us from Russia. He was a true admirer of Marshal Piłsudski. At the same time, however, the Poles wanted to have their cake and eat it too."

In light of all this, the thesis often repeated in Polish historiography that Hitler's sympathy for Poland in the 1930s was merely a hoax and a ploy to lull the Poles into a false sense of security, whom Hitler intended to invade and murder sooner or later, seems simply false. If this were indeed the case, we would be dealing with the greatest deception, lasting over five years, not only in the history of the Third Reich, but probably in the history of the world.

We are familiar with the transcripts of Hitler's private conversations and his meetings with his closest associates. During these conversations, he repeatedly expressed his sympathy for the Polish people. Why would he do that if he hated them? To mislead future historians who, many years later, would come across accounts and transcripts of his conversations? Or perhaps he lied to his trusted confidants? That seems unlikely.

Polish-German rapprochement is a topic that is rarely discussed in Poland today. This is because it is a sensitive issue. The very fact that Hitler—who later turned out to be such a terrible criminal—had a soft spot for Poles in the 1930s seems uncomfortable

and compromising. And it is better not to mention at all that Poland also sought détente with its western neighbor.

Knowing this, it is difficult to defend the thesis that Józef Beck and the entire Polish nation rejected with disgust the proposal of an alliance with the National Socialist, anti-Semite, and racist Hitler in 1939. This alliance was a fact between 1934 and 1939 and was going quite well. It was Beck's spring decision to switch to the Anglo-French camp that was a sudden turn in Polish foreign policy, which caused astonishment throughout Europe, especially in Berlin and... Paris and London.

The thesis, still promoted today, based on Beck's repeated platitudes about the equal distance that Warsaw was supposed to maintain between Berlin and Moscow, is simply untrue. "Warsaw was much closer to Berlin than to Moscow," wrote Professor Stanisław Żerko, "not only in geographical terms, but also in political terms. Everything separated Poland from the USSR, while despite all their reservations about Nazi ideology, Polish leaders saw the Third Reich as a country with which they could strengthen their emerging good-neighborly relations."

Relations with the Soviets were never even remotely as close as those with the Reich. Even after the signing of the 1932 agreement, which was of much less significance and had far fewer consequences than the pact with Germany concluded two years later. Beck never even considered establishing closer relations with Stalin, as he understood that this would automatically lead to Sovietization and the destruction of the Republic of Poland. He understood that such an alliance would be suicidal for Poland.

He therefore considered only two alliances: either with France and Great Britain (an option he did not pursue until after April 6, 1939), or with Germany, with which Poland had close relations in the years 1934–1939. This was also how the world perceived it at the time. The rapprochement with Berlin meant that at the turn of 1938 and 1939, Poland was considered de facto Hitler's closest ally. Probably never before had Warsaw had such bad press in Paris and London as it did then.

Let's take a look at the most important European events of that period. On March 15, 1938, hysterical crowds welcome German tanks on the streets of Vienna. The Anschluss takes place. In October, the Sudetenland is incorporated into the Third Reich. Hitler triumphs, he is at the height of his success, and to the horror of the Western powers, the Versailles order ceases to exist. Winston Churchill wrote in his memoirs that both events, the Anschluss and the Sudetenland, would not have been possible without Poland's favorable position.

Although he forgot that the partition of Czechoslovakia had been decided at the Munich Conference, where the British played the leading role, he was indeed quite right. Poland was the only major European country that had no objection to the Anschluss (even Italy opposed it for a long time), which greatly helped Hitler.

During the Sudeten crisis, Józef Beck pledged not to allow Soviet troops to pass through Poland if they were coming to the aid of Czechoslovakia. This pledge was worth its weight in gold to Hitler. Incidentally, during both of these German ventures, Beck himself pursued an aggressive policy towards his neighbors. When the leader of the Third Reich carried out the Anschluss, on March 17, 1938, the Polish government issued an ultimatum to Lithuania, forcing it to establish relations with Poland.

When Germany annexed the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia, on October 2, 1938, Polish troops commanded by General Władysław Bortnowski entered Zaolzie. This territory was annexed to Poland, and thus the Republic of Poland, together with Germany, took part in the partition of its neighbor. "Historical justice has been done. The ancient Piast land, Zaolzie Silesia, has returned to Poland," Beck said in a radio address.

In this situation, it is hardly surprising that Poland was considered Hitler's ally by the rest of the world. What is more, whether we like it or not, Poland was indeed that ally.

"If war had broken out during the Czech crisis," wrote Władysław Studnicki, a leading Polish Germanophile, "Poland would have found itself in the same camp as Germany and, in the event of Russian intervention, would have fought alongside Germany against Russia. Poland was [because] determined not to allow the Russian army to pass through its territory.".

Certain diplomatic documents have survived which indicate that Studnicki may have been right. While preparing to enter Zaolzie, Beck asked the Germans whether, if Poland became involved in the war as a result of this action, it could count on Germany's support. Interestingly, he also sounded out the other side. He asked the French whether they would be willing to join Poland in opposing the Reich. However, Paris's response was, of course, negative, while Berlin's was positive.

The latter was handed over to Ambassador Józef Lipski on October 1 by Ribbentrop himself, which shows how much importance the Reich attached to this matter. Lipski sent the following report to Warsaw about what he had heard from the head of German diplomacy: “1. In the event of an armed conflict between Poland and Czechoslovakia, the German government will maintain a friendly stance towards Poland. 2. In the event of a conflict between Poland and the Soviet Union, the German government will take a much more than friendly stance towards Poland, with [Ribbentrop] making it clear that the German government would provide assistance.”

Hermann Göring said the same thing to our diplomat on the same day. "It is completely unthinkable that the Reich would not help Poland in its fight against the Soviets," he declared.

In 1938, Germany considered its alliance with Poland to be extremely valuable, as it had proven itself during two serious crises, during which Hitler achieved considerable success, thanks in part to Warsaw's support. The problem, however, was that Austria and Czechoslovakia were only appetizers for him before the main course. Or rather, two courses.

Chapter 16

Uhlans on the German crusade

On the eve of World War II, Adolf Hitler had two grand plans that he intended to carry out by force. The first was to crush France, and the second was to crush the Soviet Union. He hated both countries fiercely. The former was Germany's eternal enemy (*Erbfeind*) number one. It was the French he fought against in the trenches of World War I, and it was the French he blamed for imposing the humiliating Treaty of Versailles on Germany.

Without revenge for World War I, without crushing France, Hitler could not dream of rebuilding Germany's power on the European continent. Not to mention achieving hegemony there. The Soviet Union, in turn, was not only a state of communism hated by Hitler, but also a country that he planned to destroy in order to realize his dream of gaining living space for Germans in the East (*Lebensraum*).

Hitler assigned a significant role to the Poles in the implementation of both of these plans. However, it was the joint anti-Soviet expedition to the East that was to fulfill the alliance concluded with Warsaw. So, even though France was to be the first victim of aggression, let us break with chronology and first take a look at German plans for the East.

The concept of acquiring Lebensraum – which Hitler had already written about in the early 1920s in his seminal work *Mein Kampf* – originated during World War I. It was then, as a result of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk concluded with the Bolsheviks in March 1918, that Germany gained vast western territories of the former Russian Empire. And although the defeat on the Western Front thwarted ambitious plans to develop this area for the needs of the Reich, the idea did not die.

One of its followers was Adolf Hitler. It was there, in the vast expanses of the East, that he saw the future of the German nation. Instead of seeking land and raw materials in distant colonies, he wanted to turn towards the Soviet Union. In order to implement this grand plan, he decided to abandon the "small plan" that had been in force in Germany until then. This plan boiled down to taking Poland's western territories and returning to the eastern border of 1914. It was a plan that was the dream of the aforementioned conservative Prussian junkers, whom Hitler hated. For him, however, it was not ambitious enough.

Here are some characteristic quotes from *Mein Kampf*: "When one desires land in Europe, this can generally only be achieved at the expense of Russia. The new Reich must once again follow in the footsteps of the old Teutonic Knights, using the German sword to offer land to the German plow and daily bread to the German people," wrote Hitler. According to him
"The demand to restore the borders of 1914 is political nonsense." He believed that "when we talk about new territories in Europe today, we can think primarily of Russia and its subordinate borderlands."

Adolf Bocheński described the transformation that took place in Germany after Hitler came to power in his book *Between Germany and Russia*: "Today, the great, powerfully awakened aspirations for German expansion into Russia have undoubtedly prevailed over the small imperialist plan to conquer the sandy counties of Pomerania in agreement with Russia. What was not there in 1790, nor in 1805, nor in 1863, what began to hatch – to the confusion of Dmowski's views – in 1916, was German imperialism in relation to

vast areas of the northwestern part of the former Russian Empire, this has now come to pass in its entirety.

According to Adolf Bocheński, Hitler's grand plan meant that Germany was seeking conflict with the Soviet Union and reconciliation with Poland. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, was on the defensive and, in order to avoid a German attack, was seeking reconciliation with them. What could it offer Berlin in return? Of course, the joint division of Poland. That is why, Bocheński argued, Poland should do everything in its power to prevent a Soviet-German agreement:

"If it is in Poland's interest," he wrote, "to maintain German-Russian antagonism, in line with the historical experiences of the Potocki, Czartoryski, and Piłsudski families, the Republic should side with Germany rather than Russia. For if one wishes to prolong the antagonism, one should not support the side that seeks to end it and reach an agreement, but rather the opposite. Therefore, those who claim that Hitler is the aggressor in the German-Russian dispute should, in the interests of Poland, side with him. This is as clear as day."

“Over the years, Hitler’s attitude towards the Polish cause, Poland, and Poles became increasingly dependent on the Germany-Russia relationship. Either with Moscow against the Poles, or with the Poles against Soviet Russia,” wrote historian Jerzy Borejsza in his book *Antyslawizm Adolfa Hitlera* (Adolf Hitler’s Anti-Slavism). In the 1930s, the latter concept prevailed. The Führer wanted to "march against the USSR, to the east, not through Poland, but with Poland."

On May 22, 1935, Hitler himself assured Ambassador Józef Lipski that "it is indeed necessary for the Germans to expand their Lebensraum, but they will not be able to find it in Poland." A month and a half later, he added that "the most terrible danger for the European continent is Russia," which in the future will remain "the only factor truly threatening Europe as a whole."

As Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz wrote, from the German perspective, the pact concluded with Poland on January 26, 1934, was *a ratum*, but its *consummatum* was to be a joint expedition to the East. It suffices to analyze the transcripts of various official and semi-official meetings between representatives of Berlin and Warsaw from 1933 to 1939 to see how much the Germans wanted to extract from the Poles some kind of binding declaration on a joint attack on the Soviets:

1. Conversation between Adolf Hitler and Alfred Wysocki, May 1933. "This is a threat we share, the greatest enemy of Western civilization," said the newly appointed chancellor about the Soviet Union.
2. Conversation between Adolf Hitler and Józef Lipski, November 1933. “There may be a danger for Western civilization, especially since Russia is cemented by communist doctrine. From this point of view, the chancellor considers Poland’s role to be extremely important. He says that Poland is the last bastion of civilization in the East. Poland has already played a similar role in history. The chancellor alludes to the Battle of Vienna," Lipski reported to Warsaw.
3. Conversation between Adolf Hitler and Józef Beck, January 1935: "Every Polish division engaged against Russia is a German division saved," says the Führer.
4. Conversation between Hermann Göring and Jan Szembek, November 1937: “We need a strong Poland. The Baltic Sea is not enough for Poland, you should keep an eye on the Black Sea,” argued the commander of the Reich Air Force.
5. Conversation between Hermann Göring and Józef Lipski, January 1935: “In the future, German policy must seek expansion in some direction. In agreement with Poland, Germany can find this expansion in the east, establishing an area of interest for Poland in Ukraine and for Germany in the northeast,” said Göring before leaving for Warsaw.

Göring added that in the case of Lithuania, "some adjustments would have to be made in favor of Poland." The Luftwaffe commander also made proposals along these lines during his numerous visits to Poland. For example, he made such proposals to General Kazimierz Sosnkowski during

hunting in Białowieża, and to Prime Minister Leon Kozłowski at a reception at the German embassy.

During this last conversation, he even specified the maximum limits of possible Polish acquisitions at the expense of the Soviets. "Poland is a link between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. Great opportunities are opening up for it from Ukraine," he argued.

These offers were made at the end of January 1939 during Ribbentrop's visit to Warsaw. Peter Kleist, the diplomat accompanying him at the time, later wrote: "The main purpose of the visit was to obtain the Polish government's consent to a joint expedition to Russia, but the Poles constantly avoided the subject."

And so one could go on quoting at length. The further into the 1930s, the more often German dignitaries, in conversations with Poles, painted a vision of a joint conquest of the Bolshevik-controlled East and put forward proposals for joining the Anti-Comintern Pact.

Since Germany recognized that it needed Poland to defeat the Soviet Union, it assumed the role of supplicant, doing everything it could to convince Warsaw of this concept. This is clearly evident when analyzing diplomatic documents from that era. It is Germany that is fawning, while Poland treats it with a certain reserve.

It is rare in international politics for the stronger party to court the weaker one so eagerly. As Hans Frank, the future governor of the General Government, enthusiastically proclaimed during his visit to Poland in 1936: "Poland and Germany walking together is a power that will be difficult to resist in Europe. It is a bloc comprising a compact mass of 100 million people!"

Our diplomats understood perfectly well that Germany was seeking rapprochement with Poland not out of any great love for the Polish people, but because it needed Poland to defeat the Soviets. “The main motive that led Hitler to seek an agreement with Poland is the belief that the interests of Poland and Germany are parallel when it comes to the Soviet question,” wrote Deputy Foreign Minister Jan Szembek in 1936.

However, before it was the Soviet Union's turn, Hitler intended to deal with France. This is evident, among other things, from the notes made by Colonel Friedrich Hossbach on November 5, 1937, during a secret meeting between the Führer and the most important German generals. It was then that the German leader revealed for the first time – for the time being to a trusted circle – that he would not hesitate to implement his policy by force if necessary.

“The most important thing for us is that during this secret Hossbach conference, Hitler talks a lot about the possibility of war with England and France, while he mentions Poland only briefly, and then only to state that there will be no war with Poland,” wrote Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz in his brilliant book *Polityka Becka* (*Beck’s Policy*). After Hitler, Fritsch, Blomberg, and Göring also spoke at the Hossbach conference. What they said is quite irrelevant to me; the only important thing is that none of them mentioned Poland with a single word. We can therefore take it as a historical certainty that in 1937 Hitler did not plan to start the war by attacking Poland, as happened in 1939.”

During this conference, Hitler pointed to France and its close ally Czechoslovakia as posing the greatest threat. As for Poland, it is clear that he was not entirely sure of its position. He assumed that it would remain neutral when Germany marched on Prague, and hoped that it would do the same during their march on Paris. However, hope was not enough. Hitler had to be sure of Poland.

This is where Berlin's increasingly strong pressure on Warsaw at the turn of 1938 and 1939 came from. Their goal was one – to get the Poles to finally make a clear declaration. For Hitler, we were a piece of the European puzzle that was essential to the realization of his plans. Contrary to what one might think based on his later actions, the Führer had learned from Germany's defeat in World War I.

The situation he feared most was the Reich becoming embroiled in a war on two fronts, which Germany simply could not win. Attacking both the Soviet Union and France at the same time would have been madness, the senselessness of which even Hitler recognized. So he decided to finish off his arch-enemies one by one, starting, of course, with the weaker one. Each time, however, he wanted to have his rear secured.

Let us take a look at a map of continental Europe in 1938. It featured the following major players, in order: France, Germany, Poland, and the Soviet Union.

We can see how important a role the Republic of Poland, separating the Soviets from Germany, played in this arrangement. A Poland favorable to Germany allowed them to deal with France peacefully, while a Poland hostile to Germany prevented them from attacking France, as it threatened their rear. The primary task of Berlin's diplomacy was therefore to persuade its eastern neighbor to finally reject any agreements with France that would oblige it to come to France's defense. And to finally seal Poland's alliance with Germany.

Such an alliance would result in Warsaw declaring neutrality during the war in Western Europe. Only then would Hitler be certain that the Poles would not attack him from the east while his army was fighting on the outskirts of Paris. He would also be certain that the Polish Army would not allow the Red Army to pass through its territory if Stalin decided to take advantage of the German-French war to attack Europe. This was supposed to be the "security of the rear."

In other words, the German war plan that took shape in 1938 consisted of two stages:

Stage 1. Germany attacks France. Poland secures the rear.

Stage 2. Germany attacks the Soviet Union. The rear is not threatened because France lies in ruins. Poland joins Germany in its expedition to the East. It helps them defeat the Red Army and then develop the vast territories of conquered Eastern Europe.

Let us remember these two points, because they form the basis for our further considerations and understanding of what really happened in September 1939. The leaders of the Third Reich spoke quite openly among themselves about these plans. On October 26, 1938, a special memorandum of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, drafted under Hitler's dictation, referred to "a war

Germany/Italy against France/England with the aim of defeating France first." At that time, the German leader did not consider war with Poland at all.

Joachim von Ribbentrop also outlined his plans at the time during a secret meeting with generals on January 22, 1939. Professor Stanisław Żerko obtained a report from this meeting and described it in his *book Polish-German Relations 1938–1939*: "Ribbentrop emphasized," wrote the Polish researcher, "the need to secure Poland's neutrality, even saying that such neutrality in the event of a conflict between the Axis and the Western powers seemed 'completely assured'. A sense of security on the border with Poland, he continued, is a prerequisite for the success of the German offensive on the French front."

But let us return to 1938. War is fast approaching, and Adolf Hitler still does not know how Józef Beck will act. German advances towards Poland continue, but the Poles keep evading the issue and refuse to give a binding answer. The Germans, growing increasingly impatient, decide to go for broke and present Poland with a final proposal to resolve all contentious issues (*Globallösung*), which would force it to clearly state its position.

Chapter 17

The Highway

A conversation that would prove decisive for the history of Poland took place on October 24, 1938, at the Grand Hotel in Berchtesgaden, where Joachim von Ribbentrop invited the Polish ambassador for a late breakfast. As noted by German protocol officer Walter Hewel – and confirmed by Polish sources – the meeting took place in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. What Ribbentrop said was neither an ultimatum nor a threat. It was presented as a proposal, or rather a package of proposals. The conversation lasted three hours.

It began with mutual flattery and assurances of pure intentions on both sides. Finally, Ribbentrop got down to business, asking Lipski for complete discretion. What the Polish diplomat heard, he said, should be passed on, necessarily verbally, only to Beck. If the press found out about it, it would be a disaster. "The time has come," said the head of German diplomacy, "to completely clear up all existing problems in relations between Germany and Poland. This would be the crowning achievement of the work begun by Marshal Piłsudski and the Führer."

Ribbentrop explained that this concerned the issue of Pomerania, separating East Prussia from the rest of the Reich, which all previous German governments had aggressively demanded be returned. The head of German diplomacy declared that Hitler was finally ready to give up these claims and recognize the entire length of Poland's western border. He referred to the Reich's renunciation of its claims to South Tyrol in the name of friendship with Mussolini.

However, he continued, in order for German society to accept such a gesture, Poland should also make a small concession and allow the Corridor to establish an extraterritorial motorway connecting both parts of the Reich. In addition, it should agree to the incorporation of the Free City of Gdańsk into the Third Reich.

In exchange for agreeing to these demands, Ribbentrop offered, on behalf of Germany, to extend the non-aggression pact "for a period of ten to twenty-five years." He also left no doubt that the possible accession of the Republic of Poland to the Anti-Comintern Pact would entail the pursuit of a "common policy towards Russia." Poland could also count on enormous economic benefits, cooperation with Berlin on the issue of colonies, and the resolution of the "Jewish question" in Poland through mass emigration.

Lipski realized the importance of what he had heard and, leaving the Grand Hotel, immediately set off for Warsaw.

Let's start with the highway. Contrary to appearances, this was not a new idea that Poles could not have expected. Already during his conversation with Lipski on May 22, 1935, Hitler himself mentioned such a compromise solution to the Pomerania problem. He said that given the scale of his Polish-German plans in the East, the issue of the "Polish Corridor" separating Prussia from the rest of Germany was a trifle that both nations would soon forget.

However, he noted that this problem could one day be solved by an extraterritorial highway, allowing Germans to move freely between the two territories of the Reich. Interestingly, this was not a German idea, but a Polish one. Hitler merely referred to a project proposed by Warsaw in the 1920s.

Let us give the floor to the distinguished Professor Stanisław Swianiewicz, the only Polish officer who was almost at the execution site in Katyn, but was spared by the NKVD at the last moment. The reason was that before the war he had maintained close contacts with German scientists, often traveled to the Reich, and was considered one of Europe's leading experts on the German economy. Such a man could be useful to the Soviets.

At the end of the 1920s, Swianiewicz spent a lot of time in Wrocław, where he worked at the Osteuropa-Institut. This was at a time when all German governments were aggressively demanding that Poland return the Corridor – no one even dreamed that a conciliatory politician like Hitler could come to power – which made relations between Poland and Germany extremely difficult.

"I often met with our consul, Mr. Radowski, there," wrote Swianiewicz. "Mr. Radowski believed that it was in Poland's interest to create a situation in which the Germans would not feel the existence of the Corridor during transport. It was then that I first heard the idea of giving the Germans the right to build an extraterritorial railway and an extraterritorial highway through the Corridor. As far as I could understand at the time, this was a project put forward by the Polish side as being in the interests of both parties. I returned from my travels to Wrocław convinced that we needed to find ways to resolve our differences with Germany."

Professor Swianiewicz went on to write: "After the war, in London, Stefan Tyszkiewicz, former initiator and president of the Polish Road League, told me that in the mid-1930s there was a project for a motorway in the form of a bridge over the so-called corridor, developed by Polish engineers. Tyszkiewicz informed F. Todt, the creator of the German motorway construction campaign, about this project, and Todt responded to it with almost enthusiastic approval. The project was to be financed mainly by Germany. However, it would have created enormous employment opportunities for at least several thousand unemployed Poles. It would have been like an extension of the German Arbeitsbeschaffung operation to Poland, in which Todt played a huge role. From a purely military point of view, the project did not pose any major dangers, as in the event of war, the bridge could be blown up almost at the push of a button, provided that some of the pillars had been mined beforehand. Tyszkiewicz, like Consul Radowski before him, believed that everything had to be done to ensure that the Germans felt as little as possible the existence of "corridor" separating East Prussia from the rest of the Reich. However, when Tyszkiewicz presented this project to Deputy Minister of Communications Piasecki, the latter rejected it outright, citing purely emotional reasons.

"Piasecki probably sensed that such a 'concession' to Germany would contradict assurances about our power," commented Mieczysław Pruszyński on this account. "Lacking significant public support, and therefore chasing cheap popularity, the Sanation government did not support Polish plans to build an extraterritorial road and railway, which were very much in our interests. Information about these projects probably did not reach Piłsudski, which is a pity, because he would undoubtedly have ensured their implementation." Pruszyński also expressed regret that Poland and Germany did not commit to a compromise solution to the Corridor issue in the pact signed in 1934. If they had done so, there would have been no problem four years later. The information provided by Swianiewicz was supplemented by Stanisław Żerko in his *Polish-German Relations 1938–1939*. It turns out that Fritz Todt did indeed develop a plan to build a motorway connecting Berlin with Königsberg. He discussed the details with Polish engineers during his visit to Warsaw in September 1935. The Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Communications, Julian Piasecki, with whom Todt met, did not express no objections to this plan.

According to a conversation between Todt and Adolf Hitler on October 23, 1938, the day before the Ribbentrop-Lipski meeting, two possible routes were considered. According to

the first, the motorway would run between Bytów and Elbląg via Pruszcz Gdański (which would be more advantageous for the Germans) or between Człuchów and Kwidzyn, which in turn would be easier for the Polish army to accept, as such a road would run further away from the coastline.

Italian road construction magnate Senator Pietro Puricelli, seeking to prevent what he believed would be a catastrophe resulting from a confrontation between Italy's two allies, also advocated the construction of a huge viaduct over the Corridor. The idea was reportedly of interest to the then Deputy Minister of Communications, Aleksander Bobkowski, who was also the son-in-law of President Ignacy Mościcki.

In 1933, during a conversation with French Prime Minister Edouard Herriot, Franklin Delano Roosevelt also considered this to be the most sensible solution. Hermann Göring told Lipski in the fall of 1936: “In exchange for compensation that would be granted to Poland in another area, [Hitler would like] to obtain greater ease in connecting East Prussia with the rest of Germany by building a motorway through Polish territory and creating a transit route for trains under Polish control.”

Also noteworthy is the conversation that took place in May 1939 between Bolesław Wieniawa-Długoszowski, the Polish ambassador to Rome, and the head of Italian diplomacy. Galeazzo Ciano said to the Pole: "Wieniawa, mon cher – think about it – a tunnel! How wide is Pomerania at its narrowest point? 40-70 kilometers [actually 32]. What harm can a tunnel do to you! Sovereignty does not apply to the underground. Have the Germans dig a tunnel. What do you think, you can agree to a tunnel, can't you?"

The extraterritorial highway, presented today as an attack on Polish independence, seems, after cool and objective analysis, to be a project that does not threaten the Republic, but could even bring it considerable benefits. In the event of an armed conflict with its western neighbor, it could be destroyed at the push of a button, and its construction would not only delay the outbreak of war between Poland and Germany, but would also resolve the Corridor issue, which had been festering for twenty years.

What seems so terrible to us today was not terrible at all to those living at the time. It was not a German project, but a Polish one, and a compromise at that, because by building the highway, Germany would renounce its claims to our Pomerania, which it had been aggressively pursuing since the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. It is significant that one of Beck's closest associates, Ambassador Józef Lipski, co-creator of Polish policy towards Germany, concluded after the minister's speech on May 5, 1939, that the construction of the motorway should be agreed to. However, Polish customs control would be carried out at the exits...

Chapter 18

Gdańsk

Let us now look at Hitler's second demand. Namely, that Poland agree to the incorporation of the Free City of Gdańsk into the Third Reich. A city for which Józef Beck was prepared to risk the lives of millions of Poles and the independence of his country, just so that it would not find itself within Germany's borders.

Joachim von Ribbentrop made the following proposal in Berchtesgaden: Gdańsk would return to the Reich, but Germany would guarantee that Polish economic interests in the city would be preserved. Warsaw would receive its own "free port" in Gdańsk, which would be connected by its own extraterritorial railway line and motorway. In addition, Warsaw would receive a guarantee "a market for its goods" in the former Free City.

Polish historiography tends to believe that this demand was the most humiliating for us. That it was by demanding Gdańsk that Hitler humiliated Poles the most. We love to repeat the famous phrase taken from the French press about the French who "did not want to die for Gdańsk." A Polish city that the nasty Hitler wanted to take away from us, and which we defended so fiercely that World War II broke out over it.

Amidst all this holy patriotic outrage and excitement, the basic fact that Gdańsk did not belong to Poland and was not located on its territory is somehow lost. So we insisted on "not giving up" something that did not belong to us anyway. The city and its surroundings – under the name Free City of Gdańsk – constituted an enclave created in 1920 under the Treaty of Versailles. Poland only had guaranteed economic interests in its territory and the right to represent this bizarre creation on the international stage.

It seems obvious, but try conducting a street survey in Poland on who Gdańsk actually belonged to when Hitler "reached out his dirty hands for it." If you disregard the 80% of people who will open their mouths and have no idea what the hell you want from them, I guarantee that most of the remaining 20% will answer without hesitation: "Polish, of course."

It is easy to understand why our historians, journalists, and politicians have created this belief. It is difficult to glorify Beck and explain that he dragged Poland into a war that cost us half of our territory in defense of a city that did not even belong to us! As a result of this war, we lost Vilnius, Lviv, Grodno, Stanislaviv, Pinsk, Ternopil, and many other cities that were much more Polish than Gdańsk.

This applies to both the nationality and ethnicity of its inhabitants. Today, Gdańsk is a city inhabited almost entirely by Poles, but before the war, Poles accounted for only ten percent of its population. Today, Gdańsk, as the the "cradle" of Solidarity, seems to be a city without which it would be difficult to imagine the Polish state. In the 1930s, however, the situation was completely different.

It was an extremely German city, or rather, as Tomasz Łubieński pointed out, an extremely Hitlerite one. The NSDAP enjoyed enormous popularity there. You surely remember the famous photo of Hitler riding in an open car through the streets of of Gdańsk, which was "returning to the motherland" in 1939, with crowds hysterical with happiness throwing themselves under his wheels. Unfortunately, this was not propaganda. Steeped in German nationalism

Gdańsk truly sought to join the Reich with all its heart. That was the will of its inhabitants. There is no reason to remain silent about this today.

It may sound funny, but the Poles really did decide to go to war with the most powerful empire in the world at that time in order to... defend a German city from the Germans. If the matter had not been so serious and had not concerned the "to be or not to be" of the Polish state and nation, one could even afford to smile at this point. Except that it was a tragic decision. And a terribly costly one – we paid too high a price for that German city.

General Władysław Anders was right when he wrote: “We did not risk war over Gdańsk and the ‘corridor’ in order to lose all our eastern territories. Then the army, every soldier, would ask: what was the point of this war?”

The status of a free city, conceived in Versailles, was downright grotesque and completely archaic, as if taken straight from the Middle Ages, when no one had yet heard of such a thing as nations. The Free City of Gdańsk could have existed during the period of German "regional fragmentation," when people thought in dynastic terms, but certainly not in the 1930s and 1940s, in an era of rampant nationalism, when the idea of the state as a creation for a single nation was at the height of its popularity.

This oddity not only irritated the Germans, but also constantly strained German-Polish relations. Removing this thorn in the side would therefore be entirely rational and in the interests of both sides. It is difficult today to understand the Polish policy on this issue at the time. When asked about it, Beck hid behind a warning from the Marshal, who had once told him that Gdańsk was the litmus test of German intentions towards Poland.

Unfortunately, apart from some vague idea of driving the League of Nations out of Gdańsk and turning the city into a "Polish-German condominium," which Beck proposed to Hitler until September 1939, Poland had no idea how to solve the Gdańsk problem. It consistently refused to allow Germany to change its formal status, but did not present any sensible ideas of its own. Meanwhile, it was a sore point that was damaging Polish-German relations and needed to be addressed sooner or later.

"The Versailles solutions concerning the Free City – and here Hitler was, unfortunately, 100% right – were one of the most dangerous bombs planted under the international order of the time," wrote Grzegorz Górski, asking the key question: "How did Minister Beck, or more broadly, the Polish authorities and public opinion, imagine the long-term resolution of the Gdańsk issue? Did they consider the existing situation to be ideal and worth maintaining even at the cost of war? Did they think that Germany would endlessly believe that a city with an 80% German population, connected by a direct border with their state territory, could function as a fictitious entity under the fictitious control of a fictitious organization? Perhaps they thought that Germany would magnanimously give up its aspirations and agree to the incorporation of Gdańsk into Poland?

And further: "Unfortunately, neither Minister Beck nor, in fact, the entire Polish ruling or opposition elite was able to answer these questions. However, the choice made indicates that the necessity of maintaining the status quo, which was irrational in every respect, was accepted, not only at the cost of sacrificing the hard-won restoration of relations with Germany, but even at the cost of war. Poland emerged from this war with the greatest proportional human losses and material losses, which it had to make up for over decades. As a result of this war, Poland lost its independence for 60 years – half the period of the partitions – because Beck had too good a memory for Marshal Piłsudski's sayings and forgot the essence of his policy.

Poland's acceptance of Gdańsk's incorporation into the Reich – in a situation where the Reich guaranteed to maintain its economic interests in the city – would not have been a huge sacrifice.

sacrifice. It would only be an acceptance of the status quo and its formalization. The city was German anyway, and Germany was ready to guarantee us almost the same on its territory as the ephemeral League of Nations had guaranteed us.

Of course, one could argue that “the Germans could not be trusted.” That we would have agreed to Gdańsk joining the Reich, and they would not have fulfilled their part of the agreement. Poland would have been immediately cut off from the port. This argument is flawed. Something like that would simply be impossible. In such a situation, the inhabitants of Gdańsk could simply pack their bags and immediately leave for the Reich. They would starve to death in their own city.

Gdańsk was completely dependent on Poland economically. It was not Gdańsk that could stifle Poland, but Poland that could stifle Gdańsk. All it took was to cut off the city from our goods and stop accepting anything that arrived at its port. This would have meant that local merchants would have had nothing to trade and would have had to declare bankruptcy. Securing our economic interests in the city was therefore primarily in the interests of the people of Gdańsk.

Let us assume, however, that the Reich decided to take such an absurd step (why?) and, acting to its own detriment, closed Gdańsk to its Polish ally. This could be a hindrance for Poland at most, but certainly not a catastrophe. After all, we were well prepared for such a scenario. And at the cost of billions of zlotys. Already in elementary school, it was drummed into my head that the port in Gdynia, the flagship project of the Second Polish Republic, was created precisely to ensure Poland's access to maritime trade in case it was cut off from Gdańsk. So Poland not only expected that sooner or later it would lose access to the city, but also spent enormous amounts of money to ensure that such a situation would not be too painful for it.

It is also worth noting that since the NSDAP took power in Gdańsk, the situation in the city had been almost idyllic compared to what local Poles had to endure during the Weimar Republic. Therefore, it was not to be expected that agreeing to the city's annexation to Hitler's Reich would threaten the safety of the local Polish population. The opposite was true. It was only after rejecting Hitler's offer that our compatriots in Gdańsk faced truly difficult times.

The paradox is that if any of the previous Reich governments had offered Poland the terms that Hitler offered us – renouncing claims to the Corridor, recognizing borders, and a 25-year pact in exchange for such insignificant concessions – Warsaw would probably not have been able to believe its luck. Although it sounds paradoxical, we could not have expected such an attractive offer from any other German government as the one we received from Hitler. The German proposals to Poland at the turn of 1938 and 1939 were really not particularly excessive.

If this offer caused Poland any damage, it was only in terms of prestige, as Beck himself and his colleagues admitted. I fully agree with him on this point. From a prestige point of view, such a solution would be disastrous. However, I will stick to my opinion. If prestige is on one side of the scale and the survival of the nation on the other, then those who choose the former do not deserve to be called responsible politicians. Unfortunately, in 1939, the fate of Poland and its citizens was in the hands of an irresponsible politician.

—

Chapter 19

Was Poland eager for war?

In fact, as many historians and journalists continue to repeat today, the war did not break out over the provincial city of Gdańsk or a few dozen kilometers of corridor through the Corridor. These were tertiary issues. Gdańsk was only a pretext, not the cause of the Polish-German war.

Hitler, like Piłsudski, who stated that Gdańsk was a test of Germany's intentions towards Poland, believed that Gdańsk was a test of Poland's intentions towards Germany. His proposal was only meant to test whether Poland was determined to form an alliance with the Reich, whether it was ready to compromise for this alliance, and whether it would stand by him when the time came. In reality, the war broke out not because of Gdańsk, but because Poland rejected Germany's offer of an alliance and preferred to ally itself with France and Great Britain.

"The demands regarding the incorporation of Gdańsk, while maintaining certain Polish rights, and a motorway through Pomerania were more of a psychological and prestige nature. An act of Polish goodwill was needed," wrote Andrzej Wielowieyski. "And it was really about three things: breaking [by the Republic] the alliance with France and maintaining neutrality when Germany attacked the West, and then a joint attack on the Soviet Union. The matter was becoming increasingly clear: if you refuse, we will destroy you and no one will save you. It was reminiscent of the warning issued by the Prussian ambassador Girolamo Lucchesini to King Stanisław August in the 18th century: "Surrender Gdańsk and Toruń to us immediately, or else we will join forces with the Russians to carry out another partition of Poland.".

I recommend Professor Stanisław Żerka's book *Polish-German Relations 1938–1939*, which I mentioned earlier. It is a fascinating read. In his monumental, nearly 500-page, excellently documented work, the Polish researcher painstakingly reconstructs all the important meetings between Polish and German politicians in the last months before the outbreak of war.

Until Poland made its pro-British turn, they always looked almost identical. Hitler, Ribbentrop, Göring, Moltke, and all the other German diplomats and leaders tried to get a clear commitment from their interlocutors: "Will you join us in attacking those wretched Soviets or not?" Each time, the Poles responded evasively, procrastinated, and played for time. And so it went on since the conclusion of the pact in 1934. For five years.

Poland's stalling tactics increasingly irritated Berlin, as they put all of Hitler's grand plans on hold. In 1938, the moment of decision was approaching, and he was still unsure about his most important partner. The proposal to settle all contentious issues, submitted in October by Ribbentrop – which the Führer considered, somewhat exaggerated, for "generous" – so it was not the first step towards war, but was peaceful in nature. So it was the opposite of what our historiography, which bends reality to suit its needs, claims.

According to Berlin's plan, both contentious issues – the Corridor and Gdańsk – were to disappear from Polish-German relations, which would break down mutual distrust and allow the alliance to be sealed so that joint preparations for an expedition against the Soviets could begin. However, Poland ignored this proposal and continued to evade a response. What is more, it interpreted Germany's intentions in the opposite way, contrary to reality.

When four months had passed since Ribbentrop had made his offer, and Warsaw, despite intense persuasion, had not given a binding answer, Hitler decided to threaten it. In addition to the carrot he had been dangling in front of it for five years, he pulled out the stick to remind it who was stronger in this arrangement.

On March 15, 1939, Hitler summoned Czechoslovak President Emil Hácha to Berlin and forced him to capitulate. Wehrmacht units entered Prague, and the pro-German Slovak state simultaneously declared independence. On March 20, Ribbentrop demanded that Lithuania surrender Klaipėda to the Reich. Kaunas gave in, and three days later Hitler arrived at the port aboard the battleship *Deutschland*. On the same day, the Reich signed an economic agreement with oil-rich Romania. And on March 21, in a conversation with Lipski, Ribbentrop once again – and, as it turned out, for the last time – repeated the proposal made in October for a compromise settlement of Polish-German relations.

It was a technical knockout for Warsaw. Not only did Germany take action in Central Europe for the first time in years without consulting Poland, or even warning it, but it also created a situation in which it became simply impossible for the Republic to wage war against the Reich. Since the Czech Republic and Slovakia came under German control, such a war would no longer even be a risk from a military point of view, it would not even be madness – it would simply be spectacular harakiri.

From then on, it was clear that if an armed conflict broke out between Poland and Germany, the Wehrmacht could attack Poland from the north (Prussia), west (the Reich), southwest (Czechia), and, to a limited extent – due to the fact that the Poles controlled Zaolzie and the strategic railway line running through it – from the south (Slovakia). Hitler assumed that there would be no foreign minister, army commander, or general staff in the world who would decide to fight in such disastrous conditions. He was certain that Poland would recognize that it had no choice in this situation and would form an alliance with him. And here he made a very serious mistake.

There was indeed such a foreign minister in the world, and his name was Józef Beck. There was also such a commander—Edward Śmigły-Rydz. There was also one and only general staff in the world—it was the General Staff of the Polish Army.

As an aside, the fall of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 fatally worsened our strategic situation vis-à-vis Germany, but significantly improved it vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Until then, pro-Soviet Czechoslovakia had served as a Bolshevik gun pointed at Poland's back. Our staff officers feared that in the event of a Polish-Soviet war, Prague would attack us from the other side. When Czechoslovakia ceased to exist as a result of German actions, this threat disappeared, which is another important argument in the discussion about who we should have fought against in the early stages of World War II.

However, Beck was not the only one to make mistakes in the spring Polish-German confrontation. Adolf Hitler showed that he completely misunderstood who he was dealing with. He did not understand the Polish psyche and clearly did not realize that in such situations, instead of giving in, Poles reject common sense and rush headlong into battle. Perhaps if he had spent more time in his youth studying the history of his continent, instead of playing with saucers at moronic meetings of Old Germanic esoteric societies, he would not have made this mistake.

The important thing is that, upon hearing about his actions, Poland played along and, on March 23, probably on the orders of Minister Józef Beck, announced a partial mobilization. Polish divisions were put on combat alert and began to be moved up to the German border. Both in the west and in the north, in the direction of Prussia. As Professor Grzegorz Górski wrote, this caused shock and disbelief in the Reich.

On March 27, Ambassador Hans von Moltke approached Józef Beck and expressed his astonishment at the Poles' actions. The minister then told him bluntly that any attempt to change the status of Gdańsk would be treated by Poland as a casus belli. "So you want to negotiate with bayonets at the ready?" said Moltke, surprised. "That is in accordance with your system," replied Beck.

It should be emphasized that until the signing of the 1934 pact, Germany lived in fear of a Polish march on Prussia and Opole Silesia. Limited by the Versailles clauses, the Reichswehr was at that time a much weaker army than the Polish Army, and the German press, which was unfavorable to us, constantly warned against "Polish invaders." In addition, the nature of the border between the two countries – the lack of natural barriers, mountains or rivers – was such that, in the event of war, both sides were virtually doomed to an offensive strategy. There was no way to defend themselves.

In his *September 1939: Alternative Reflections*, Grzegorz Górski raises the question of whether it was the Polish side that sought to bring about the outbreak of war as quickly as possible. "It is extremely characteristic," he wrote, "that one of the most influential representatives of the Polish general staff, General Tadeusz Kutrzeba, at the turn of 1937 and 1938, formulated in an extensive study on a possible future Polish-German conflict-German conflict, that given the pace of development of the German armed forces, the later the war broke out, the greater their advantage over Poland would be. Hence, he argued that postponing the conflict was to Germany's advantage."

Deputy Foreign Minister Jan Szembek noted in his *diary* on March 24, 1939: "The mood among our generals is very heated. One often hears them say that the present moment—when England stands behind us—is the only time to provoke a conflict."

On the same day, during a briefing at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Józef Beck told his colleagues: "If we were to join those Eastern countries that allow themselves to be dictated to, then I don't know where it would end. That is why it is better to go against the enemy than to wait for him to come to us."

Economic factors may also have played a role. Once Poland had been put on a war footing – as warned by Treasury Minister Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski – maintaining this state of affairs for a long period of time would have meant complete bankruptcy and the collapse of the entire economic system. A state of neither war nor peace, with the entire nation under arms and no conflict breaking out, would be fatal for the Republic.

"Two months are enough to ruin our structure, which is weak in comparison with the German one," said Wacław Stachiewicz, Chief of the Polish General Staff.

Górski pointed out that the Polish General Staff began working hastily on Plan West concerning the war with the Reich at the beginning of March (it was ready on the 23rd of that month), i.e. nearly a month and a half before the Germans began working on their plan to attack Poland (*Fall Weiss*). This means that Polish staff officers spent several weeks "working intensively on a plan to defend against an aggression that no one on the German side was even able to predict yet."

“Comparing the progress of Polish war preparations with the German attitude during this period, we cannot fail to notice the complete disproportion between the actions taken on both sides,” wrote Górski. According to him, this may explain why Beck became so bold and unyielding in his talks with the Germans. "This toughness towards Germany created a kind of compulsion to bring about war," he added.

Three months earlier, on January 8, 1939, Beck, immediately after returning from a visit to Germany, convened a secret meeting at the Royal Castle in Warsaw. The most important people in the country took part in it. President Ignacy Mościcki, Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz, and Prime Minister Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski. Beck said bluntly that Poland must

now take a firm stance against Berlin. He said that the period of détente was over and that rein in the "emboldened" Germans.

August Zaleski later said that until his January visit to Berchtesgaden, "Beck believed that Poland should be the third partner in the Axis, in exchange for which it would be left in peace by the Germans and perhaps even make some money in the east."

Had he already decided to make a U-turn and join the camp of the Reich's opponents? Had it already been decided in Warsaw that, as Beck put it, "we will fight" a much more powerful enemy? And the sooner, the better? If these assumptions are true, then we are no longer talking only about the extreme irresponsibility of our pre-war leadership. We are talking about an act that qualifies for a trial before a state tribunal.

However, I believe it is unlikely that Beck was thinking about starting a war. His reckless policy of "showing Germany our teeth" was more of a big bluff, an attempt to deter Hitler from war rather than provoke him into it. However, it is very likely that some of our generals were pushing for war. Reading pre-war newspapers, memoirs, and other accounts shows that the percentage of people with a megalomaniacal, belligerent attitude among the commanders of the Polish Army was extremely high.

However, this does not absolve Beck, the chief architect of Polish foreign policy, of responsibility for the consequences of the war, which we lost so disastrously. When, on September 3, 1939, Great Britain and France formally declared war on Germany, Beck reportedly breathed a sigh of relief and said to his secretary: "The nation would have the right to put me up against a wall and shoot me if they had not entered the war." He believed that the French and British would now save Poland. Not only did they fail to save it, but the alliance he had concluded turned out to be a bad check. So the nation did indeed have the right to judge its minister harshly.

Chapter 20

Would we end up like the Czechs?

Before we move on to the finale and I attempt to reconstruct how it came to be that the Republic of Poland's former close ally crushed it into pulp with tank tracks – and did so in partnership with a would-be common enemy – please bear with me for a moment. I must dispel one more myth concerning Hitler's offer to Poland.

In Poland, it is widely believed that this offer was a perfidious deception. Hitler had no desire to form an alliance with Poland, and the proposals made on October 24, 1938, were only the first step. If Poland had given in, proponents of this theory argue, Hitler would have quickly demanded the Corridor, then Silesia, then Poznań, and finally Łódź, Warsaw, and who knows, maybe even Lviv. In other words, if we had given in once, then "it would have gone on" and we would have ended up like the Czechs.

In fact, this thesis could be refuted in a single sentence. It does sound reasonable, but there is one problem. There is not a single document to support it. A huge part of the archives of the German Auswärtiges Amt, i.e. the German Foreign Ministry, was published or made available to historians after the war. Transcripts of conversations and meetings, memoirs, and diaries of people who were at the top of the Third Reich at the time have been preserved.

They provide insight into the ideas of the Führer and his closest circle of associates, as well as the secrets of his pre-war plans and policies. While hundreds of documents attesting to Hitler's genuine desire to form an alliance with Poland have survived, there are simply no documents even suggesting that the offer made to Warsaw was a ruse. Until the beginning of 1939, when Beck began to make a shift in Polish foreign policy, there is no evidence in the available sources that the Führer was thinking of conquering Poland. He first mentioned the possibility of conflict with Warsaw on February 18, 1939. As one of his aides, Major Gerhard Engel, wrote in his notes, Hitler still hoped to persuade Poland to strengthen its alliance and join him in an expedition against the Soviets. However, impatient with Beck's delaying tactics, he stated that if Poland did not agree to the German offer, he would have to use "means other than diplomatic ones" against it. However, he did not decide on this solution until early April 1939, when Poland concluded a pact with Great Britain aimed at the Reich.

As proof of the thesis that Germany's offer to Poland was a trap, the completely unreliable account of the former president of the Free City of Gdańsk, Hermann Rauschning, is often cited. He included it in his book *Conversations with Hitler*, published in exile after the Polish-German breakup. The book was riddled with various distortions and fabrications by the author. This was also the case with the post factum description of an alleged conversation with Hitler, who was supposed to have told Rauschning that he wanted to use the same tactics against Poland as he had used against Czechoslovakia. That is, to start with Gdańsk and then devour it piece by piece.

"Until the first weeks and months of 1939 – wrote Martin Broszat – there was virtually no indication that Hitler would not be prepared, in the event of Poland's unconditional support for his cause, to grant it a similarly privileged place in the reconstruction and Greater German-led area of Eastern and Central Europe, as he later did to the Slovaks, Hungarians, and Romanians. Supporters of revisionist policy were mistaken in thinking that behind

The non-aggression pact with Poland conceals a cunningly disguised old concept of anti-Polish irredentism.

The documents we know confirm that Broszat was right. Except for one "nuance." It seems that due to its size, strategic location, and military potential—factors that were particularly important during the joint expedition to the East—Poland would not have been given a position in the Third Reich's system of military alliances equivalent to that of Slovakia, Hungary, or Romania, but rather one equivalent to that of Italy. Let us repeat: the stronger a country was, the stronger its position alongside Germany.

“There is no doubt,” wrote Grzegorz Górski, “that the belief, formulated as a certainty in Polish historiography, that [with the Gdańsk issue] Germany began a game that was to end in September 1939, has no basis whatsoever. Germany's actions over the next few months prove beyond doubt something completely different. During this period, they did not take any steps that could be considered a consistent pursuit of an anti-Polish policy; on the contrary. From previous German and other ongoing "games," it is clear that, at least until the end of April 1939, they sought to resolve issues of interest to them without conducting any parallel war preparations or even elementary propaganda campaigns.

Joachim von Ribbentrop, sitting in an Allied prison cell after the war – when he no longer had any reason to lie – wrote that the offer he had made to Poland in October 1938 was intended
“solve German-Polish problems once and for all.”

German historian Gerd Wehner pointed out that Hitler's intentions are best illustrated by how he treated the German minority in Poland. "It can be said that Hitler was looking for a younger partner [in Poland]. This is indicated by his abandonment of the German minority in Poland. In this context, it suffices to compare Hitler's commitment to the Sudeten Germans with his attitude towards the German minority in Poland," wrote Wehner.

Indeed, these were diametrically different situations. Before taking action against Czechoslovakia, the German press and the Führer himself had been harping on for years about the "terrible situation" of the Sudeten Germans. Examples of Prague's cruelty towards this community were widely publicized. Every incident, even the most trivial, was blown out of proportion.

With Poland, it was the opposite. Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, citing Hitler's explicit orders, forbade newspapers from writing about the problems faced by German citizens of the Republic of Poland. Even serious harassment, which sometimes befell this community, was hushed up and ignored by the German media. Leaders of the German community in the Second Polish Republic sat unsuccessfully in the waiting rooms of Reich dignitaries. Their complaints were ignored.

The fact that the Führer "renounced" this community – as the Germans with Polish passports themselves said – is the best proof that he seriously considered Poland an ally, not an enemy. The fate of his compatriots under foreign rule could not have been a matter of indifference to the leader of the Third Reich, a fanatical nationalist. Nevertheless, in order not to alienate the Poles, he waved away the trifling matter of 800,000 people.

It was not until late spring 1939, when war began to loom between Germany and Poland, that the German press launched a massive campaign in defense of their compatriots living in Poland. It was then that a propaganda war similar to the one before the Sudeten crisis began. Earlier, however, as long as Hitler was counting on the Polish Army to join him in his march on Moscow, such tones did not appear in the German press.

So where did the belief that “it wasn’t supposed to end with Gdańsk” come from? From Józef Beck’s fears at the time, which arose immediately after the October talks between Lipski and Ribbentrop. I will repeat this once again: fears that are, to a certain extent, understandable.

The Ribbentrop–Lipski conversation took place immediately after the Sudetenland was taken from Germany. The Germans could not have chosen a worse moment. The French took advantage of this to weave their intrigues aimed at causing discord between Warsaw and Berlin. As Jan Meysztowicz recalled, Ambassador Nöel visited the offices of Polish dignitaries and asked them, “without too much embarrassment,” whether it would now be Poland’s turn. You really had to be Hitler – who, let's be honest, was a complete moron – to make such proposals to Poland at such a moment. We can complain about our foreign minister, but what can the Germans say?

Even Nikita Khrushchev—with his shoe-banging at the UN General Assembly—seems like a master of subtle diplomacy compared to the leader of the Third Reich and his aide, Ribbentrop. The latter, with his sensitivity and tact, might have been suited to being a butcher or a stonemason, but certainly not a foreign minister. Making such a proposal at that moment, knowing the impetuousness of the Poles, was an absurd move. Although the demands made on the Republic of Poland were moderate and the intentions peaceful, they were perceived in a manner contrary to Germany's intentions.

Poland was not supposed to be Germany's victim, but its ally. Hitler's offer, conveyed by Ribbentrop, was not intended to break up Poland, but to bind it more closely to the Reich. However, Warsaw misunderstood it and, instead of bringing Poland closer to the Reich, it only distanced it and hardened its position. Karol Kraczkiewicz, an employee of the Polish Embassy in Berlin, who published his memoirs in the Paris-based Zeszyty Historyczne (Historical Notebooks) in 1984, was right when he wrote that in this final Polish-German showdown, both sides completely misunderstood each other and misinterpreted their partner's intentions.

The aforementioned Martin Broszat, author of the pioneering book *National Socialist Policy on Poland 1939–1945*, published in Stuttgart in 1961, emphasized that Poland's definitive rejection of the German proposal for a final settlement of all disputed issues was caused by "the unexpected attack on Bohemia and Moravia on March 15, 1939." What Hitler did to Czechoslovakia ultimately confirmed the Polish foreign minister's false belief that "Gdańsk is only the beginning."

Broszat believed that this was a serious mistake on Hitler's part, as he had "recklessly provoked" the Poles into joining the camp of his opponents. He himself thus contributed significantly to the loss of a valuable ally in the planned next stage of the war against the Soviet Union. He also undermined his own success, which was the signing of the 1934 pact, which meant "Poland's withdrawal from the French alliance system."

Martin Broszat pointed to yet another piece of evidence that made the thesis that Hitler was secretly preparing a plan to destroy Poland and seize its territory unlikely. When Wehrmacht tanks invaded Polish territory on September 1, 1939, and Junkers began bombing Polish roads and cities, the Führer had virtually no idea what to do with defeated Poland.

The primary goal of the war was to crush Poland so that it would not threaten German rear lines during the planned campaign against France. But Hitler did not know what to do with Polish territory itself. In September, he was still wavering between two basic concepts. The first involved turning the entire Polish territory, which he had acquired under the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, into a large German colony, while the second involved reducing the territory of the Republic of Poland but leaving some form of truncated Polish statehood (*Reststaat*). This was a similar option to the one implemented less than a year later after the defeat of France.

Ultimately, as we know, the intermediate concept prevailed and a bizarre entity called the General Government was created. It was neither a colony nor a separate country. However, it was a complete improvisation. The fact that a truncated Polish state would not be created was decided by Stalin's very firm protests, as he did not agree to such a solution. It is obvious that

If Hitler had been planning to invade Poland for years, he would have had very specific ideas about what to do with its territory. He would have had plenty of time to think it through and plan it.

"When considering long-term plans for Germany's far-reaching territorial expansion in the East," wrote Martin Broszat, "Hitler always thought first and foremost about the territory of the Soviet Union. It was only now, in the spring and summer of 1939, that the area of Poland emerged in his field of vision as the first possible and concrete stage of such a new order of national and territorial relations."

Let us assume for a moment that those who support the theory of Hitler's deception are right. Let us assume that Hitler was secretly preparing a plan to dismember Poland after his eastern neighbor gave in on the issue of Gdańsk, but he kept it so secret that he did not even mention it to Ribbentrop or his other closest associates. This is, of course, unlikely, but let us try to analyze such a scenario.

The events unfold as follows: Poland agrees to Germany's terms. Beck signs a 25-year pact with Ribbentrop, Hitler recognizes Poland's western border, and Gdańsk returns to the Reich. Construction of the motorway begins. Hitler trumpets his enormous success, but his appetite grows. After a few months, he makes further demands of his most important ally. You will give us Pomerania and Silesia. And then Józef Beck simply says... no.

I cannot understand why accepting Hitler's October proposal would automatically mean that we would then have to give him everything. Proponents of this thesis generally use pseudo-psychological generalizations such as: "once you give in, it is difficult to resist afterwards." This is not true. In 1939, the stakes were so high that it really did no harm to try and find out what Hitler's intentions really were. The example of Great Britain shows that it is possible to give in at first in order to gain time and recognize the opponent's intentions, and then confront him. A country that first pursued a policy of appeasement when it was not yet ready for armed conflict, and then made a 180-degree turn. It declared war on Hitler and brought it to a victorious end.

If, after the pact was extended, it turned out that Hitler really did have evil intentions towards Poland, Beck could have terminated the pact and history would have unfolded exactly as it did in reality. We would have blown up that unfortunate highway (if, of course, the Polish-German consortium had managed to build it by then) and fought the Germans. The difference would have been that the attack on Poland would have taken place much later, probably after the attack on France. And every year, every month, week, or day of delay was worth its weight in gold at that time. The aim was to gain time – to arm the army to the maximum and shorten the period of suffering of the peoples of the Republic.

However, for the sake of those who are still not satisfied, let us consider a scenario in which Poland, by agreeing to the incorporation of Gdańsk into the Reich, would indeed have to follow the path of Czechoslovakia. This is absurd, but let me remind you once again that the method used in this book requires us to analyze every course of events. So let us assume that in 1939 Poland seals an alliance with Germany, Beck signs a pact with Ribbentrop, and suddenly magical things begin to happen.

Adolf Hitler renounces his grand plans to conquer France and the Soviet Union and instead hypnotizes Beck, who, under hypnotic suggestion, hands over Poland to him piece by piece. First Pomerania, then Silesia, then the Poznań Province. Finally, the hypnotist summons his victim, and Beck, like Emil Hácha before him, meekly signs a document in Berlin accepting the absorption of all of Poland by the Third Reich and the creation of the Protectorate of Mazovia, Lesser Poland, Galicia, Podlasie, Polesia, Volhynia, Vilnius, etc.

I will repeat once again: it is completely impossible, but even if it did happen, Poland's fate would be much better than it actually was. Czech disgrace is truly better than Polish disgrace.

A catastrophe. Better that than the disgrace of several million murdered Poles – men, women, and children. Let us consider the Czechs, so despised by Poles. Did they really fare so badly by soberly assessing their chances in 1939 and not joining a war they could not win?

In a conversation with Melchior Wańkowicz, which took place during his internment in Romania, Józef Beck argued that thanks to Poland's decision to take the brunt of Hitler's attack, after the war "we will sit down at the negotiating table as equal partners, while the Czechs, for example, will be standing outside the door." When you read such things, a shiver runs down your spine. In whose hands was the fate of Poland at this most important moment in its history!

You have to be truly Polish, or even ultra-Polish, to say something like that. The fact that the Germans and Soviets were shredding the Polish nation like cabbage was of no importance to Beck. The important thing was that we would not be left standing outside the door at some future peace conference... What a child Beck was (born in 1894!), if he believed that if we stood in the way of German tanks and then allowed ourselves to be murdered, the whole world would open its mouth in admiration and then, as a reward for this beautiful and honorable attitude, "allow us to the table."

Unfortunately, global politics is governed by different rules. Instead of inspiring respect, such an attitude is met with a contemptuous smile or, worse still, a shrug of the shoulders. And here's a side note. How poor a hand Marshal Piłsudski had in choosing his successors. How wrong he was to leave Beck at the helm of Polish diplomacy and Śmigły-Rydz at the helm of the Polish army.

But let's get back to the Czechs. How many times have I heard Poles say that our southern neighbors are a cowardly nation, without honor and of despicable character. How could they surrender to the Germans without firing a single shot and sit like mice under a broom during the occupation? These are typical Polish accusations against the Czechs. Have you heard this joke? "German sense of humor. Italian courage. English cuisine. Russian technical thought. Czech resistance."

We love to compare ourselves to the Czechs, against whom we look even better with our swaggering attitude during World War II and our "achievements." But do we really have anything to be proud of? Czech casualties during World War II amounted to about two percent of the pre-war population. The country remained almost untouched by the war. Let's compare today's Czech Republic with today's Poland. Let's compare Warsaw with Prague...

Compared to the Czech Republic, the Third Republic is a country that is an entire era behind in terms of civilization. This is the lasting effect of World War II, after which
"Polish heroes" were treated the same as "Czech cowards." Both our nations were crushed under Soviet occupation, and Joseph Stalin did not care who pursued what policy during the war. What I am about to write may sound shocking, but really, all our enormous efforts and all the sacrifices we made between 1939 and 1945 were completely pointless. It would have been better in 1939 to follow in the footsteps of the Czechs than to get involved in a war we could not win.

Chapter 21

Berlin's vassal or partner?

If we had accepted Hitler's proposal in 1938 or 1939, would we have remained a sovereign state? This is, of course, the crucial question that must be asked when analyzing such a scenario. Unfortunately, the answer is unpleasant – in such a situation, we would probably have lost our sovereignty. During the talks in Berchtesgaden, Ribbentrop unambiguously suggested that Poland should sign a consultation clause with Germany, under which both countries would agree on their foreign policy.

“After 1933, Hitler recognized that Poland’s neutrality alone was of great value, and that there could be a place for the Republic of Poland in a ‘German Europe,’” wrote Professor Stanisław Żerko. "However, the condition was that Warsaw would join the camp led by the Reich. For Hitler, rapprochement with Poland was not just a tactical move. The Führer assumed that the Republic would first adopt a foreign policy course consistent with Berlin's interests and then find itself completely within the Reich's orbit, moving to the pro-German camp. In the war for "living space" for the German nation, he wanted Poland on his side."

It is obvious that in such an arrangement, it would not be the weaker Poland (*the junior partner*) that would impose its will on Germany, but Germany that would impose its will on Poland. And at best, such negotiations would be extremely difficult. It is difficult to expect that Poland would remain a fully independent state after signing a pact with Germany. So why do I still insist that the German offer should have been accepted? The answer is simple: it is better to lose sovereignty than independence.

Here, I would like to give the floor to the distinguished historian Jerzy Łojek, son of a Polish officer murdered in Katyn: "In light of historical research, it seems today that in the European situation of 1939, the Republic of Poland could no longer maintain itself as a completely sovereign state and had to join forces with one of its neighbors in a way that would temporarily deprive it of part of its territory and significantly limit its independence," he wrote in *Agresja 17 września 1939* (The Aggression of September 17, 1939). “In this situation, Poland’s raison d’état dictated the choice of only such dependence as would be temporary in nature, removable after a change in the global political situation. It was obvious that dependence on the USSR would deprive Poland of its sovereignty practically forever. It was impossible to expect such a turn of events in the coming Second World War that would result in the defeat of both great totalitarian states by the Allied powers.”

Professor Łojek went on to write: "Maintaining peace with Germany – contrary to what Minister Beck claimed in his famous speech to the Sejm on May 5, 1939 – at 'any cost,' in the international situation at that time, was a condition for the continued existence of an independent Poland, or at least one that still had a real chance of regaining its full sovereignty in the future, even if it was temporarily strained. […] After Munich, there was probably only one option that could have ensured Poland a better fate than the one it suffered in 1939–1945: immediate accession to the Anti-Comintern Pact and a slow, delayed but realistic entry into a transitional alliance with Hitler, even at the cost of border adjustments and a certain limitation of Polish political independence for a time.

foreign policy, while significantly loosening relations with France, and in the ideological sphere, with a very significant strengthening of the Promethean idea.

In other words: anything to wait it out. Anything to delay entering the war. Instead of bleeding out in a hopeless, lonely struggle – play for time and wait. Temporarily relinquish some sovereignty and wait for the international situation to change, for the moment when the Allies begin to gain the upper hand on the Western Front. Only then, of course after defeating the Soviets, should we start fighting the Germans, who were already on their last legs.

The extent of this loss of sovereignty remains a matter of speculation and conjecture. Within the Axis system, the situation varied. There were countries, such as Slovakia and Croatia, that were vassals of the Reich, carrying out almost all of its orders. There were also countries that tried to maneuver and maintain as much independence as possible, such as Hungary and Romania. Finally, there was Italy, which, although it obviously coordinated its foreign policy with Hitler, remained independent. It even played tricks on him, such as invading the Balkans without consulting the Reich.

Of course, this depended on the potential, military strength, and strategic location of the state. This leads us to believe—as I have already written—that our status would be closer to that of Rome than Bratislava.

The greatest threat to our sovereignty would be posed by the march of the Wehrmacht and other German formations on their way to the East. As Adolf Bocheński put it: would German troops, marching on Moscow, not "get tired already near Baranovichi"? Bocheński himself, in *Between Germany and Russia*, dispelled similar fears as follows: "From what the opponents of the march say, it would appear that its inadmissibility is some kind of axiom of the foreign policy of great powers. Anyone with even a cursory knowledge of history will understand the nonsense of this claim. In 1914, France did not prevent British troops from marching through its territory, just as Turkey not only did not prevent German troops from entering, but actually invited them in. If Belgium did not allow German troops to pass through, it was more than happy to allow British troops to pass through, and Romania made the entry of a large number of Russian troops into its territory a condition for joining the world war! Going back a little further, Austria directly invited Russian troops onto its territory in 1849, and in 1813 it allowed Polish troops to pass through Bohemia. In 1805, Prussia allowed both French and Russian troops to pass through its territory. How many more similar cases could be mentioned? Now the question arises as to whether all these countries really suffered from such marches. Sometimes they did not end very well, such as the march of Russian troops through Romania in 1877, while in other cases they only benefited the countries that granted the right of passage. No fixed rules can be put forward in this regard. The best proof of this is that in 1792, the Poles strongly criticized the Prussians for not wanting to march through their territory to Russia. On the other hand, any Pole who had prevented Napoleon from marching through Poland in 1812 or hindered Charles XII's campaign in 1709 would have been considered insane. If the march of allied troops is carried out for a purpose that is desirable for the state, it is beneficial, but if the purpose is undesirable, as in the case of Germany and Belgium in 1914, it is extremely disadvantageous. So, it's not so much about the fact that "the march will take place," but about whether the goal that the army is aiming for is desirable for the country and whether the hope of achieving it outweighs the risk and possible inconveniences of having a foreign army on the country's territory.

It is difficult not to consider the goal of breaking up the Soviet Union as undesirable for the Polish state or even for humanity. As for the risk, we are again forced to use a comparative method and look at the situation of other countries allied

with the Reich. Indeed, in some of them, German troops stationed there carried out or attempted to carry out coups and take control of them.

This was the case with Romania, Hungary, and Italy. However, this happened at the end of the war, in 1944 – in the case of Italy in 1943 – when these countries surrendered or attempted to switch sides to the Allies. However, as long as they remained loyal to the Reich, the German troops moving through their territories behaved correctly. So if there really was a threat from this side, it was not in 1940 or 1941, when we were supposed to attack the Bolsheviks together with the Germans, but a few years later, if we had tried to extricate ourselves from this troublesome alliance at the end of the war.

Finally, one more bitter remark, which may be painful for Polish sensibilities. If we did indeed go to war with Germany in 1939 to defend our sovereignty, then we also suffered a crushing defeat in this field. In September 1939, Poland lost not only its territory (which is mentioned in textbooks), but also its sovereignty (which is not mentioned in textbooks). From the end of September, despite the flight of its state authorities abroad, it was no longer an independent state. All stories about maintaining Poland's sovereignty through the existence of a government in exile are nothing but a fairy tale.

According to the April Constitution, the President of the Republic had the right to appoint his successor. Ignacy Mościcki took advantage of this provision after crossing the Romanian border. He sent a decree to Paris, where the new Polish authorities were being formed, appointing Bolesław Wieniawa-Długoszowski as the new president. He was a former favorite of Piłsudski and, most recently, the Polish ambassador to Rome.

As soon as this decision was made, the French, who were not particularly fond of the Sanacja movement, to put it mildly, took decisive action. They downright hated Józef Beck and his team for their pro-German policy in the years 1934–1939. On September 26, 1939, Roger Raczyński, our ambassador in Bucharest, where the President of the Republic of Poland was staying, was summoned by the French ambassador there. He then handed him a dispatch sent from Paris.

"The French government," the document states, "has been informed that President Mościcki has designated his ambassador in Rome as his successor. Please urgently inform Mr. Mościcki that the French government, having no confidence in the designated person, does not see, to its deep regret, any possibility of recognizing any government appointed by General Wieniawa." At the same time, in Paris, the police surrounded a small Polish printing house, where Monitor Polski was already rolling off the press with a decree appointing Wieniawa as president.

What did Mościcki do? Did he consider this a threat to Poland's sovereignty and declare war on France? Not at all. Mościcki meekly revoked his decree and, instead of Wieniawa, appointed a candidate acceptable to Paris – Władysław Raczkiewicz. Thus, thanks to the coup d'état carried out by the French, the Polish government fell into the hands of a faction chosen by them, headed by the Francophile General Władysław Sikorski. This man would soon earn himself the nickname "ivy politician" because he was completely subservient to the will of Paris, and later, when France capitulated to Hitler, to London.

If that wasn't a loss of sovereignty, then I really don't know what was. If Beck had accepted Germany's offer in 1939 and joined the Anti-Comintern Pact, they couldn't even have dreamed of electing the Polish president. The most far-reaching consultations on foreign policy with Berlin would have been nothing compared to how France and later Great Britain treated Poland in 1939–1944. The word “vassal” in relation to Sikorski, and certainly to Mikołajczyk, is really very mild.

Of course, one could say that there is a difference between losing sovereignty to a neighbor who wants to take away part of our territory and countries located far away, such as France or England. Well, in this case, there was no difference. Well, maybe except for one. In the worst case scenario, a potential

German partner would, at worst, try to take two or three border provinces from us, while our British partner gave the whole of Poland to Stalin.

Supporters of the thesis that Beck did the right thing by rejecting Hitler's offer, "because we would have lost our sovereignty," seem to be completely blind to reality. This thesis might be correct if we had regained our sovereignty as a result of World War II. However, as a result of Beck's decision, we lost not only our sovereignty, but also our independence. And this lasted for sixty years, because we did not regain it until 1989.

Jerzy Łojek pointed out that the dependence of Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria on the Third Reich appears to be complete freedom compared to the total control that the Soviet Union exercised over these countries after the war. It is therefore certain that Poland's dependence on the Third Reich after the agreement with it in 1939 would have been much looser than the dependence of the Polish People's Republic on the Soviet Union.

Hitler would not have established a Polish National Socialist party in Warsaw. He would not have set up a small Gestapo in Poland to murder Polish patriots. He would not have tried to impose his political and economic system on Poland, nor would he have tried to fill the most important positions with his own people. The argument that the possible loss of sovereignty was a legitimate reason for rejecting Hitler's offer therefore does not stand up to criticism.

"We did not want to find ourselves in an alliance with the Third Reich, but we ended up in an alliance with the equally criminal Soviet Union," said Professor Paweł Wieczorkiewicz. "And what's worse, under its absolute domination. Hitler never treated his allies the way Stalin treated the countries he conquered after World War II. He respected their sovereignty and autonomy, imposing only certain restrictions on foreign policy. Our dependence on Germany would therefore have been much less than what we fell into after the war with the Soviet Union.".

Chapter 22

The Lords' Trap

On September 1, 1944, General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, one of the few reasonable Poles who found themselves at the top of the government during World War II, issued his last order. Order number 19. "Soldiers of the Home Army!" wrote the commander-in-chief. Five years have passed since Poland, having listened to the encouragement of the British government and received its guarantees, gave the Allies eight months of invaluable time and allowed Great Britain to make up for its lack of preparation for war."

Furthermore, this order was a dramatic accusation against Great Britain of cowardice and abandoning the Poles alone themselves in the face of the German enemy. The reaction of our British "allies" was immediate. The order was stopped, and Prime Minister Mikołajczyk and President Raczkiewicz – at the express request of Foreign Minister Anthony Eden – dismissed General Sosnkowski from his position as commander-in-chief (this is relevant to our sovereignty).

"The general's proclamation caused outrage against him for 'insulting the English,'" wrote Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz about the storm that erupted not only in British government circles, but also in "Polish London." "The outrage, or rather criticism, of Sosnkowski in connection with his just and beautiful order was expressed by many, many... people, whom I will not mention here out of... chivalry. Even more disgusting to me than these signs of servility and lack of national dignity were the proofs of complete stupidity when some people, including even former Piłsudski supporters, explained to me that Sosnkowski's order diminished "Poland's contribution to the war." These fools really seemed to think that the world was at war with Germany at our behest and that it had started fighting in our defense.

What was it that outraged the British and the Poles, who blindly followed them, in 1944? It was the fact that a Polish statesman decided to tell his nation the truth. A truth that Poles continue to repress to this day. It contradicts the myth we are so proud of, that Great Britain entered the war to defend Poland. The truth is quite different. It was not Poland that dragged Great Britain into the war, but Great Britain that dragged Poland into the war.

Let us consider the situation in Europe at the beginning of 1939. It is becoming increasingly clear that war will break out on the continent. In the very heart of Europe, an aggressive power was rising, flexing its muscles and baring its teeth. It was arming itself to the teeth, absorbing more and more territory, and openly proclaiming the need to destroy the Versailles order. It is clear that Germany will soon unleash its army on someone, that war is only a matter of time – after all, that is why the army is being built up. The only unknown is who will be the target. Who will be the first to go? Who will find themselves in the worst situation and have to take the first blow from the powerful war machine of the Third Reich?

At that time, Europe resembled the cage of a hungry, enraged tiger, pacing around its enclosure, roaring and preparing to pounce. In the middle of the cage, someone had placed a rickety ladder, at the top of which sat several terrified novice wild animal tamers. They knew they could not avoid confrontation with the enraged beast, but they also realized that the first one to fall off the ladder would be in the worst situation.

The hungry beast will pounce on him with the greatest fury and literally tear him to shreds. The time it takes to digest him will allow the other men to gain some time. And if

the unfortunate victim who goes first manages to somehow knock out a couple of the tiger's teeth, so much the better. By the time it's the others' turn, the beast will be a little tired, weakened, and not as bloodthirsty. Maybe they'll manage somehow.

However, as you might guess, no one wants to be a "loser." The men at the top of the ladder push, pull, bite, and scratch, trying to knock each other down. Just not me. Just let misfortune befall someone else. The fight is fierce because the stakes are high—life itself. At the bottom, the beast is already sitting on its haunches, licking its lips and roaring wildly, staring up, considering which of the tamers to eat first. Impatient, it nudges the increasingly unstable ladder with its paw.

At that moment, one of the men has an idea and turns to the other. "Jump, brother, and I'll come down after you. When you're fighting the tiger, I'll grab its tail and pull hard! You'll see, it'll be fine. Together, we'll give the beast a hard time." And what does our tamer do? Instead of punching his insolent "friend" in the face and trying to push him off the ladder himself, he smiles from ear to ear. He can't believe his luck at getting such a great offer and... jumps headfirst into the beast's jaws.

Of course, I don't need to tell you how this story ended for our unfortunate fellow. Suffice it to say that his simple-minded gesture and sad fate only provoked bursts of laughter at the top of the ladder. The man who made the offer obviously had no intention of climbing down the ladder to help the naive man. He just wanted to buy some time. What would you say about our daredevil? Naive? Naive. If you agree, then you also agree that Józef Beck, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, was a naive politician...

From the cage littered with bloody shreds of what until recently were human beings, let us return to Europe in the early spring of 1939. Everything indicates that Hitler will choose France as his first victim. It seems that soon General Heinz Guderian, author of the groundbreaking work *Achtung – Panzer!*, will be able to fill the radiators of his tanks with water from the Seine, and Wehrmacht soldiers will be able to spend their pay in the brothels of Paris.

The French are terrified, but so are the British. Paris is really not far from London. And war preparations in the British Isles have not even entered the preliminary phase. England is not ready for war. The French, sitting behind the Maginot Line, feel a little more confident, but the more sensible politicians there are full of dark thoughts. The chances of repelling the first strike from the West are slim. Intelligence reports are alarming: the Third Reich's industrial plants are working at full capacity. More and more planes and tanks are rolling off the production lines. From across the Rhine, the ominous growls of a powerful and hungry beast can be heard.

The British government is inundated with alarming information from its agents and diplomats operating on the continent. According to one report, the Luftwaffe is about to be ready for a massive air attack on the British Isles. The US ambassador in London, Joseph P. Kennedy, warns His Majesty's government that German headquarters are drawing up plans to invade France. The Wehrmacht is already making all the necessary preparations.

"The Germans are finally determined to strike the West," Franklin Delano Roosevelt says in a conversation with a diplomat from one of the European countries. The British, on the other hand, have excellent contacts among German officers opposed to the National Socialist regime, who bluntly inform their friends in London that the Führer intends to
"start in the West."

"We have very accurate information that Herr Hitler is considering an attack on the West in the coming spring," Lord Halifax wrote in January 1939. There is no question that any danger would threaten the Republic of Poland. Poland is safe, as it is bound by

pact signed with Germany. Another British diplomat, Alexander Cadogan, noted: "Intelligence does not indicate any immediate threat to Poland from a German attack."

German documents can also be cited to confirm this statement.
"The Führer does not wish to resolve the Gdańsk issue by force. That would push Poland into Britain's arms," noted Wehrmacht commander General Walther von Brauchitsch on March 25.

In Paris and London, they know that Hitler intends to start the war by attacking the West. He is only waiting for the final formality – Józef Beck's signature on the pact sealing the Polish-German alliance. A pact that is supposed to secure his rear. As soon as Beck signs, the Führer will be able to issue the order he has been dreaming of for so long: "Attack!" The horses of the German cavalry are already pawing the ground, tank crews are warming up their engines, planes laden with bombs are taxiing onto the runways, and Józef Beck does not sign. The tension reaches its peak, with the eyes of all Europe fixed on our foreign minister.

This is a moment in history – the turning point between March and April 1939 – when Poland plays the most important role in its history. It is not only a regional or European role. It is a global role. Its decision will determine the course of World War II. It will determine the fate of Poland, Germany, France, Great Britain, and, above all, the Soviet Union. The course of this conflict depends on Beck's decision. Who will fight against whom, and who will fall first.

At the time, the matter seemed settled. No one expected Beck to refuse Berlin. His delay in responding to the German proposal was seen as stalling for time or simply playing hard to get. It was not difficult to predict how Poland would fare if it rejected the German proposals... This meant that Great Britain watched what was happening on the continent with a growing sense of helplessness.

On January 25, at a government meeting in London, it was stated that "Germany may explode in the very near future and that it is imperative for us to take immediate measures against the possibility of it being directed against us." Two months later, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain said that "Poland is the key to the situation" and that everything depends on its decision.

And then, in London, a crazy idea was born. What if... No, Poles cannot be that naive... Probably not, but what's the harm in trying? As a result of similar discussions, on March 31, Chamberlain appeared in the House of Commons and announced, on behalf of his cabinet, guarantees of Poland's independence. "In the event of any action that would threaten Poland's independence, His Majesty's government will feel obliged to help Poland with all the means at its disposal," he said. He added that the French government had authorized him to convey the same on behalf of Paris.

The whole of diplomatic Europe was astonished by this clumsy British attempt to pull Poland out of its alliance with Germany and draw it into an alliance with Great Britain and France. Never mind Europe – even the French and British themselves were convinced that they would receive a decisive rejection from the Poles. It can be assumed that the proposal made to Warsaw was an act of desperation on the part of London.

On March 22, when the idea of announcing the guarantee was born, the French ambassador in London told the then head of British diplomacy, Edward Halifax, not to get his hopes up. According to him, Beck would refuse, citing the lack of "material assistance from the Western Powers." Quoting this statement in his book, Professor Grzegorz Górski emphasized that it was astonishing that what was obvious to the French did not even occur to Beck.

The British reasoned similarly. On January 14, 1939, Howard Kennard, the British ambassador to Poland, wrote to Lord Halifax: "Beck has based his policy on the conviction that neither the British nor the French governments will be prepared, when the need arises, to offer Poland effective assistance against further German expansion in Central Europe."

to offer Poland effective assistance against further German expansion in Central Europe."

Beck's chief of staff, Michał Łubieński, wrote that when his boss accepted Chamberlain's guarantees, the British were astonished. They understood that this meant a "heavy defeat by Hitler" for Poland. Beck, however, clearly dismissed such fears. According to British historian and politician Lewis Bernstein, Namier later boasted that he had decided to accept London's offer without hesitation. Between one shake of ash from his cigarette and the next.

Not only was he not concerned about the British offer, he was delighted with it. When he was informed about it, he rushed to the station, boarded a train, and immediately traveled to London. There, he not only accepted the British guarantees, but also granted Great Britain a guarantee of independence on behalf of Poland. The relevant agreement was signed with Lord Halifax on April 6, 1939. Thus, the British-Polish alliance became a reality.

By signing this agreement – which we can call the Halifax–Beck Pact – Józef Beck not only made a breakneck volte-face and instantly shifted Poland from the German camp to the anti-German camp. Józef Beck also signed the death warrant for the Republic of Poland. On that day, it became clear that the Wehrmacht would attack Poland first.

What was Great Britain's game at this turning point in world history? London, faithful to its age-old principle of combating any European power that sought to achieve hegemony on the continent, was extremely concerned about Germany's growing power and increasingly aggressive attitude. The British were particularly concerned about the possibility of the Reich taking their colonies and attacking nearby Paris.

British leaders had no doubt that the only way to break Germany would be through war, and in the spring of 1939 they were already determined to However, they were not eager to engage in a quick confrontation with the Wehrmacht. Remembering the age-old – and very wise! – English principle of always fighting with other people's soldiers and sparing their own blood, they tried to provoke Hitler into attacking other countries. Preferably as far away from their own borders as possible.

That is why they first sacrificed Czechoslovakia, and then gave guarantees to Poland (which eagerly jumped into the trap) and Romania (which behaved sensibly and did not allow itself to be drawn in). It was clear that if such guarantees were accepted, they would provoke a German attack on these countries and Hitler would be bogged down in southern or eastern Europe for many months. This would significantly delay the invasion of the western part of the continent. Thanks to Józef Beck's disastrous decision, these calculations proved to be correct.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Edmund Ironside, wrote in his diary: "We cannot expose ourselves to a German attack. If we do, it will be obvious suicide." No, the British were not suicidal. That role was reserved for the "naive Polacks." The American ambassador in London, Joseph P. Kennedy, was right when he called the guarantees given to Poland by Great Britain an evasion. Of course, an evasion from the first German blow.

"The Polish leadership did not realize that England and France, as was widely known in Europe, were not prepared for war. They needed time to catch up with the Reich, and they were determined to gain that time at any cost," wrote Professor Paweł Wieczorkiewicz. "The situation in Europe was such that there was a sleigh with hunters (the French and the English) who had yet to assemble their rifles, and behind them was a pack of wolves. To save their skins, they had to throw down more victims. The first was Austria, the second was Czechoslovakia, and the third was Poland. Except that in our case, the optimal solution for the British, who had already decided to go to war, was a scenario in which Poland would resist.”

According to Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz, accepting the London guarantee was "one of the most tragic dates in Polish history." "Accepting this guarantee was a mental aberration

and madness. This weighs heavily on the memory of Colonel Józef Beck, but also falls heavily on all his colleagues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs," emphasized the conservative journalist.

On the same day that Great Britain offered guarantees to Poland, March 31, 1939, Lord Halifax openly told his secretary: "We do not believe that the guarantee will bind us." Another leading British diplomat, Alexander Cadogan, wrote in his diary: "Naturally, our guarantee does not help Poland. One could say that it was cruel to Poland... even cynical."

The very next day after the guarantee to the Republic of Poland was announced, an editorial appeared in The Times stating: "Our new commitment does not impose on Great Britain the obligation to defend every inch of Poland's current borders." It is worth mentioning that the then editor-in-chief of the newspaper, , , , , , Geoffrey Dawson, , was a close friend and informal spokesman for Chamberlain. So he knew what he was publishing.

The United Kingdom and France did not even seriously consider providing any assistance to the Republic of Poland. They were simply playing for time. It was not British and French soldiers who were to die for Gdańsk – as the Paris press wrote at the time – but the opposite: it was Polish soldiers who were soon to die alone for Paris and London. The British guarantee did not secure Poland's independence; its obvious consequence was the destruction of that independence. We were destined to be devoured by the beast to satisfy its first hunger. And we, like fools, allowed ourselves to be drawn into this trap.

Chapter 23

I'll mix them a devil's cocktail

Upon hearing the news that Great Britain had offered Poland guarantees, the Führer flew into a rage. He banged his fist on the table, waved his arms and shouted furiously: "I'll brew them such a mess that they'll choke on it!" – so much so that the glasses in his office reportedly shook. According to another version, remembered by Abwehr chief Wilhelm Canaris, he announced that he would brew not porridge, but
a "devil's cocktail."

The day after he learned of Chamberlain's speech in the House of Commons, on April 1, 1939, the German leader delivered a sharp anti-British speech in Wilhelmshaven during the launch of the battleship *Tirpitz*. He spoke about politics.
England's "encirclement" of Germany, into which Poland had just been drawn. Documents from the Third Reich disclosed after the war show that Hitler and his associates were shocked by Józef Beck's volte-face. They considered him an ally. A difficult ally – somewhat stubborn and evasive – but certainly not an enemy.

In mid-March, the Germans were still confident that Poland would capitulate. The Führer was convinced that, with its back against the wall, Poland would sooner or later agree to German terms, allowing him to realize his grand ambitions in Europe. However, Poland's resistance caused increasing irritation to the German dictator. In the second half of March, after Poland announced partial mobilization, he began to talk to his associates about the possibility of confrontation with the Republic. In fact, there are many indications that he had already predicted that if Warsaw did not agree to a settlement, he would have to change his plans towards it. He predicted that a potential ally would then become a serious obstacle that would have to be removed. Now this dark scenario was beginning to come true.

In *Na rozdrożach dziejów (At the Crossroads of History),* Andrzej Wielowieyski quotes an extremely interesting report by Hans-Adolf von Moltke, the chauffeur of the Reich Ambassador in Warsaw. The chauffeur was an agent of the "two" and, during Ribbentrop's visit to Warsaw in early 1939, he allegedly overheard an interesting exchange. Getting into the car, the head of German diplomacy said to the ambassador: "They are tough, we will have to change the order." According to Wielowieyski, these words can only be understood as follows: "We cannot attack France because the Poles will attack us from behind, so we must first eliminate Poland."

Such thoughts may indeed have been circulating in German government circles at the beginning of the year (see Major Gerhard Engel's notes from February 1939). However, there is no doubt that Adolf Hitler made the decision to attack Poland after Poland accepted British guarantees of independence and concluded a pact with London in early April 1939. Only then did the situation finally become clear. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this was a real blow to the Führer. In this way, London cut through all his plans with a single – admittedly masterful – diplomatic stroke. Removing Poland from Hitler's complicated European puzzle made his plans impossible to carry out.

"Now clearly allied with both Western powers, the Republic – wrote Stanisław Żerko – blocked the movements of the Nazi Reich both in the west (as an ally of Great Britain and France, it had to attack Germany if the latter launched an aggression in the West) and in the east (by refusing to join forces with Germany

against the Soviet Union). Refusing to attack Poland [in the new situation] would be tantamount to abandoning the entire expansion program that the Führer intended to implement."

Since Poland had joined the alliance between Great Britain and France, it was now the weakest link in the chain. And a war on two fronts always begins with the weakest ally. British diplomats were not mistaken in their calculations.

In response to the Halifax–Beck Pact, Hitler immediately ordered his staff to prepare *Fall Weiss*, a draft plan for an attack on Poland. The directive was ready on April 11, and the army was to be ready to attack its eastern neighbor on September 1. Hitler later admitted that he had made this decision after careful consideration. After analyzing the new situation created by Poland's unexpected volte-face, he decided that he had no choice: he had to strike Poland first. This decision was made during a "walking trip" across the North Sea, which he took on April 1–4 aboard the ship *Robert Ley*.

When handing over the directive on preparing a plan for war against Poland to the head of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, General Wilhelm Keitel, the Führer explained: "Germany's attitude towards Poland is to avoid tensions, but if Poland wants to change its policy based on similar assumptions and takes a threatening stance towards the Reich, then a final reckoning must take place." Poland changed this policy on April 6, 1939, by signing a pact with Great Britain. Let us remember this date, because it is one of the most important dates in Polish history. It should be emphasized here that until then, Germany had no plan for war with Poland. This is further proof that before Beck's unexpected volte-face at the turn of March and April 1939, Hitler had no aggressive or expansionist plans towards the Republic of Poland. Until the spring of 1939, the leader of the Third Reich was determined to start the war with France. It was only Józef Beck who His "brilliant policy" caused World War II to start with us.

Let's take another look at Hitler's war plan so far. He intended to spread the armed conflict over two phases, always securing his rear against a possible "stab in the back":

Stage 1. Germany attacks France. Poland secures the rear.

Stage 2. Germany and Poland attack the Soviet Union. The rear is not threatened because France lies in ruins and Great Britain has been "pushed back onto the island."

Minister Beck's acceptance of British guarantees rendered this entire elaborate plan unfeasible. The Polish minister hoped that this would deter Hitler and prevent war. Unfortunately, the leader of the Third Reich was not a man who gave up easily, and he decided to carry out his plan. The difference was that since he had failed to "neutralize" Poland through an alliance, he decided to do so by other means. Due to Beck's recklessness, Poland moved to the top of the "hit list."

From Germany's perspective, it was obvious that Poland should be attacked in the new situation. It was the weakest, and Hitler realized that, as Cat-Mackiewicz put it, "we Poles are not Englishmen and we keep our agreements." So, in the event of a German attack first on France and Great Britain, Germany could assume with a high degree of probability that the Republic of Poland would keep its commitments and march on Prussia and Berlin.

With the same degree of probability, he could assume that in the opposite scenario – an attack on Poland first – pacifist France and unprepared England would not even lift a finger to defend their new "ally." He was not mistaken.

The matter was therefore settled. Plans were revised, and now Germany was to be the first target. "Rebellious" Poland. There was still one piece missing in the new puzzle. As we remember, Hitler always made sure to secure his rear during his military campaigns. So if Poland was destroyed, who would secure the Wehrmacht's rear during the attack on France?

Immediately after issuing the directive on the war with Poland, Hitler instructed his diplomats to conduct initial exploratory talks with the Soviet ambassador in Berlin...

Hitler's new war plan now looked like this:

Stage 1. Germany attacks Poland. Its rear is secured by French pacifism and the inability of Great Britain to take swift action.

Stage 2. Germany attacks France. Their rear is secured by the previous defeat of Poland and an alliance with the Soviet Union.

Stage 3. Germany attacks the Soviet Union. Their rear is not threatened because France lies in ruins and Great Britain has been "pushed back to its island."

And so, unfortunately for us, history unfolded...

The mood prevailing in the German camp at the turn of March and April 1939 is perfectly reflected in Joseph Goebbels' diaries. Under the date of April 1, 1939, the Reich's propaganda chief wrote: "Will Beck, who is currently on his way to London, allow himself to be persuaded to adopt an anti-German stance? It seems unbelievable." On April 10, when the situation had become clear, he added: "London and Warsaw have concluded a mutual assistance pact. So Beck has allowed himself to be drawn into the lords' trap after all. Perhaps Poland will one day have to pay dearly for this."

At that time, the magazine Kladderadatsch published a characteristic caricature, which Eugeniusz Cezary Król described in his book on German propaganda against Poland. An elderly lady wearing a helmet with the symbol of the pound sterling hands over a bomb with the inscription "Polish-English Pact" to a delighted little boy wearing a confederate cap and boots with spurs. She says: "Here you go, boy, play with your new ball over there by the [German] neighbor's house."

Later, this idea was developed in Theo Matejko's famous poster, which was hung by the Germans after the 1939 campaign on the streets of occupied Polish cities. It depicted a house collapsing as a result of a bomb strike and a street littered with corpses. It also showed a wounded Polish soldier in a cap, who turns reproachfully to an indifferent Chamberlain: "England! Your doing!" It was for tearing down such a poster in November 1939 that 24-year-old Elżbieta Zahorska was shot in Warsaw. This crime shook Poland and was a harbinger of the nightmare of occupation. Unfortunately, German propaganda was right in this case. It was Great Britain that provoked Germany's attack on Poland.

On April 5, before Beck had even returned from his "triumphant" visit to London, a telegram arrived in Berlin for Ambassador Hans Adolf von Moltke. It clearly stated that "the Führer's proposal to Poland" was no longer valid and that Moltke should no longer conduct any talks on the subject. Instead of allying themselves with the powerful Reich, the Poles, the document stated, preferred to "rattle their sabers."

At the same time, Ambassador Lipski in Warsaw heard from one of the German diplomats that Adolf Hitler's proposal of an alliance with the Republic of Poland was now a thing of the past. And it would never be repeated. "We cannot change that. Time will tell whether Poland has acted wisely," our diplomat was told.

"The formation of such a powerful coalition came as a complete surprise to Ribbentrop. Contrary to Beck's hopes, however, it did not deter Hitler, who sharply intensified his rhetoric against Poland," wrote Professor Wieczorkiewicz.

There is no doubt that, contrary to the theories repeated like a mantra in our historiography, Germany did not attack Poland because of Gdańsk or because it wanted to take Poland's western provinces. Hitler renounced these ambitions, seeking rapprochement with the Republic of Poland in 1934. The reason for the attack on September 1, 1939, was Józef Beck's refusal to participate in the implementation of Germany's grand plans in Europe and Poland's unexpected shift to the camp hostile to the Reich.

German leaders themselves spoke openly about this. "Mr. Beck has joined the Western powers. He has decided his own fate," said the Führer in a conversation with Romanian Foreign Minister Grigore Gafencu. Sincerely concerned about "Polish

betrayal," Göring scolded Józef Lipski: "We are not concerned about Gdańsk at all, the bone of contention is your alliance with England."

Chapter 24

The West's dream ally

When Beck arrived in London at the beginning of April, he was despised, although he himself, excited and deluded by his "historic role," did not notice this. Poland was not only disliked in Great Britain, but downright hated. I have already written that it was treated as "Hitler's closest ally," which, like a hyena, pounced on humiliated Czechoslovakia to take away its Zaolzie region.

Poland not only had excellent relations with Germany (the British were not fully aware of the growing differences between Berlin and Warsaw), but also with Japan and Italy, which we supported during the war in Abyssinia. To this should be added our friendship with Hungary, which was leaning increasingly towards Berlin. The French ambassador to Poland, Léon Noël, who hated Beck and portrayed him as a "Hitlerophile," played a particularly significant role in giving us a bad reputation in the West.

"The outside world already considered Poland to be Hitler's best and perhaps only truly devoted ally at that moment," wrote Professor Grzegorz Górski. "This statement may be shocking. After all, we are accustomed to treating Stalin as Hitler's best ally. With his policies in 1939–1941, he significantly aided German expansion." We played this role vis-à-vis the Third Reich in 1938 during the Austrian and Sudeten crises. At that time, our policy also "significantly aided German expansion."

In the British Isles, Poland was considered not only a country that had served Hitler, but also a country with a nasty, authoritarian system of government, a European backwater where anti-Semitism and ignorance reigned supreme. From the very beginning of the Republic of Poland, the British attitude towards us was extremely critical. There was a complete consensus in the British Isles that the lands beyond the Curzon Line did not belong to Poland and should have gone to the Soviets. The English saw Poland's aspirations in the East as a manifestation of our "imperialism."

It is truly surprising that Józef Beck did not ask himself why Great Britain, which had been so hostile towards us until then, suddenly fell in love with Poland to such an extent that it guaranteed us independence. He probably considered it a gift from heaven and decided not to bother with the reasons behind this miracle. But did he really not hear the words of David Lloyd George, who told a Polish MP in London outright that Poland, as a reactionary country, did not deserve help?

Meanwhile, euphoria broke out in Warsaw. “Beck gladly seized on the promise of an English guarantee,” wrote Stanisław Mackiewicz. “It was entirely to the liking of our public. We are forming an alliance not with the hideous Nazis or the repulsive Bolsheviks, but with distant, democratic England. I fully share my nation's sympathy for the English people and their system of government, with the proviso that being governed by sympathy in international affairs is usually disastrous."

Military circles, traditionally anti-German and pro-French, were also satisfied, as they neither understood nor supported Beck's policy of rapprochement with the Reich pursued until then. Let us recall the words of the Marshal, who reacted so sharply to the critical voices that appeared among the Polish general staff, enamored with their "French sister," after the signing of the pact with Germany in 1934.

"French sister."

After signing the pact with Great Britain, Józef Beck himself proudly declared that "we are in good company." What naive words from a politician. Such a statement might be expected from an excitable schoolgirl, but not from a seasoned player who is deciding the fate of his country and its people. A serious politician, when choosing allies, is not guided by the manners of a potential partner, but by his own national interest.

Did the man from Beck's "good company" – the eminent British statesman Winston Churchill – mind that during World War II he found himself in the nasty company of Joseph Stalin? Certainly. After all, he was considered the leading British anti-communist before and after the war. He hated Stalin and was well aware of many of his crimes. However, he also knew that a dirty alliance with this bloodthirsty dictator was in the interests of his nation.

"Beck was a kind of Don Quixote in Europe at that time, fighting windmills," wrote Grzegorz Górski, "that is, politicians who cynically, stopping at nothing, including lies and intrigue, sought to best secure the interests of their countries. Beck's attitude was certainly noble, but was it wise? Knowing who he was dealing with, how his "partners" in the diplomatic games of the time pursued their interests, did he have the right to adopt an attitude that could, and ultimately did, bring unimaginable misfortune upon Poland and the Polish people? And in this context, do we still have the right today to claim that Polish policy at the time was doomed to the maneuvers undertaken by Beck? Certainly not!

So let me repeat: the guarantees given to Poland by Great Britain were not intended to save it, but to destroy it. The political genius of England lies, among other things, in its ability to learn from history. This is a trait that, unfortunately, cannot be attributed to the Poles. British leaders had a good memory and knew how Germany had been defeated in World War I. And they decided to do everything in their power to ensure that this scenario would repeat itself.

The recipe was simple: to finish off Berlin through a protracted conflict on two fronts. However, General William Edmund Ironside's inspection visit, which took place on July 17–21, 1939, only reinforced the British conviction that Poland, with its armed forces incapable of waging war against its western neighbor and commanded by an operetta marshal, was simply not a suitable partner for such a war.

The only solution, therefore, was to repeat the scenario from 1914–1918 exactly. So, the second front in the East should not have been created by Poland, where our strength

The "allies" did not believe it, but Moscow did. It was no coincidence that London and Paris had been trying so hard since the early months of 1939 to draw Stalin into an alliance against Germany. Only a German-Soviet conflict could divert Hitler's attention from the West for a longer period of time and embroil him in a real, protracted campaign in the East. Only such a war could save England.

Since its inception, the Second Polish Republic was considered by the French – and later also by the British – to be merely a substitute for Russia. When the tsarist regime collapsed in 1917 and was replaced by unpredictable Bolshevism, Paris had to find a new ally in the East. A country that could be used to check Germany from the east. The choice fell, of course, on the most powerful country in the region, the Republic. However, it was an ally by necessity, an ally that the French openly referred to as a substitute (*une alliée de remplacement*). It was simply chosen for lack of a better option.

In the West, however, the idea of returning to the situation of 1914 and drawing Russia into an anti-German alliance never died. Even if it was Bolshevik Russia. This idea was revived, of course, on the eve of World War II. France and Great Britain decided at that time that it would be best if, in the fight against Hitler, it was not their own soldiers who died, but

Red Army soldiers. The German-Soviet conflict, which would tie up the Führer in Eastern Europe for a long time and seriously strain his forces, became the greatest dream for London and Paris. It became a potential salvation.

The premise seemed obvious, but there was just one small problem. How could a war be provoked between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union when the two countries did not even share a border? There could only be one answer: a border had to be created. This meant removing the country that separated the two totalitarian giants: Poland.

Another goal of granting Warsaw guarantees – after provoking Hitler's attack on Poland and diverting his attention from the West – was precisely to bring about a conflict between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. This is what Polish diplomats failed to understand.

One of the representatives of our Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Stanisław Zabiełło, recreated the mindset of Beck and his colleagues in his memoirs: “We could not imagine that Great Britain and France could start a war and not come to our aid. Their interest in maintaining two fronts against Germany seemed indisputable. Therefore, we did not lose hope that as soon as our allies declared war on the Third Reich, we would emerge from it successfully, even improving our international situation, although the first months in particular would be extremely difficult."

Of course, maintaining two fronts against Germany was "undoubtedly" in the interests of Great Britain and France. No one denies that. The only problem was that it was not us who were supposed to create that second front for them. It was supposed to be done by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. We were merely an obstacle to that goal, which had to be removed – by Hitler's hands.

Ultimately, these calculations proved to be only partially correct. After Poland was divided between Hitler and Stalin, war did indeed break out. But not immediately, as our wonderful "allies" in Paris and London had hoped, but only after a year and a half. So France could not be saved, as the Wehrmacht had managed to smash it to pieces in the meantime, but England was saved...

As early as October 1938, Ambassador Edward Raczyński reported to Warsaw that the outbreak of the German-Soviet war was considered in London to be "a lesser evil that could protect Great Britain from great danger." Since 1937, and perhaps even earlier, there has been a struggle between two policies: Western countries, led by England, want to direct the storm towards the East, while the Soviets want to direct it towards the West. The diplomat added that "England seemed to be pushing Germany into conflict with the Soviets." What wise words these were! Unfortunately, this warning, like many others, was ignored by our Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The paradox of this whole game was that in 1939, France and Great Britain's dream ally was the Soviet Union, but both countries, unable to form such an alliance (for the time being), had to settle for Poland. Hitler's dream ally was Poland, but due to Józef Beck's decision, which dashed any hopes of such an alliance, Hitler had to settle for the Soviet Union.

Let us listen to Stanisław Mackiewicz: “England does not need Poland to exist; it never has. Sometimes it is in its interest to push us against Russia – as before the era of the Great Sejm – sometimes against Germany, sometimes, as in 1939, to direct Hitler's attack against us, in order to divert Hitler's blow from itself and turn it against Russia. But after giving us "guarantees" in 1939. England was not interested in our armaments, did not help us financially in our war preparations, and then had no intention of helping us during Hitler's invasion of Poland, not dropping a single bomb on Germany at that time.

On the contrary, England bases its foreign policy on the antagonisms between the great European powers. It needs friction between Russia and Germany. The existence of a great

Poland would weaken these tensions. Therefore, it is in England's interest that Poland should either cease to exist altogether or be as small as possible.

And further: "After all, everyone knew that Hitler had liquidated Austria and liquidated Czechoslovakia as a prelude to war with the West, so that during this war with the West no one would attack him from the flank. Now, if Hitler finds out that Poland is aligning itself with the West, he will of course attack Poland. Great Britain readily and gladly gave these deceptive 'guarantees'. Why? Precisely because from that moment on, one word is repeated constantly in all British diplomatic correspondence: Russia, Russia, and Russia. England wants above all to ensure that Hitler attacks the Russians first, not the British. England's reasoning is as follows: if Hitler finds out that Poland has sided with us, he will obviously attack Poland. Poland is weak, its army on horseback is worthless, its general staff consists of people of little intellectual value, its military equipment is poor, and we will obviously not give a penny to help Polish armaments in any way. Hitler will therefore quickly deal with the Polish army and come face to face with the Russians. This must result in a Russian-German war, which is the fulfillment of our dreams, turning the first danger away from us and against Russia. So the guarantee of Polish independence given by England was not only no guarantee of our independence, but on the contrary, it was speculation on the earliest possible elimination of that independence. England not only wanted Poland to be the first to go to war with Germany, but also wanted Poland to be as defenseless as possible in this war, so that it would lose the war as quickly as possible.

Beck was fooled by Great Britain like a small child and entered into an alliance with it that had such a disastrous impact on the fate of the Republic. Together with the entire nation, he allowed himself to be drawn into a trap. The paradox is that until the end of his life, he considered Poland's alleged introduction of Great Britain into the war to be his greatest success. What is worse, to this day, Beck's infantile, naive view is considered obvious in Poland. Meanwhile, it was Stalin's greatest success. The Polish-British pact made a joint Polish-German expedition against the Soviets impossible, which would inevitably have led to the collapse of the red empire. Rejected by the Poles, Hitler now had to come to Stalin as a supplicant. Thanks to Józef Beck's actions, the Soviet dictator unexpectedly went from being the hunted to the hunter. His first trophy was to be Poland.

I promised not to quote the letter from Bartoszewski, Rotfeld, and Zalewski again, but please allow me to do so one more time. This will truly be the last time. This document contains, in condensed form, all the illusions and myths that still persist today in the perception of the "work" of the last head of diplomacy of the Second Polish Republic by his compatriots. Including this illusion:

"After Germany occupied Czechoslovakia and Klaipėda in March 1939, the British government finally decided to get involved in Central Europe," wrote Polish politicians. However, the key factor was the British conviction that Poland would not succumb to Berlin's blackmail. The mutual security guarantees granted by Poland and Great Britain on April 6, 1939, were Józef Beck's greatest diplomatic achievement. Beck's policy [...] turned the war with Germany into a European and then a global conflict.

Poles never change. Our leading politicians truly believe that in order to defend Poland – "Christ" and "the inspiration" of nations – and its friendly inhabitants, the British Empire got itself involved in a six-year war with the powerful Third Reich. They believe that it was Beck who caused the outbreak of World War II. The war between Germany and France, Italy and Great Britain, and Japan and America. Yes, it was our doing. Ours and that of our brilliant minister...

"For Poles, war is something like a pistol duel," wrote Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz. – Two people of honor surrounded by a group of seconds in stiff

collars and with the participation of a surgeon. Just as a man of honor should not do anything that would indicate that he is afraid of a duel, so a nation should constantly demonstrate that it will not back down from war. For the English, war is the defense of national interests, if possible by shedding the blood of others and exposing other countries to danger. Right or wrong – my country.

For Poles, foreign policy is a revolving stage for the recitations of Słowacki and other bards. Sometimes the stage turns, the directors and stars leave, if not for Berdyczów, then for Zaleszczyki, and children, underage girls with incomparable heroism, go into "battle without weapons," where they are shot, massacred, murdered. For England, the concept of a "fight without weapons" does not exist, and if it did, it would be frivolous, comical, something like someone claiming they can fly even though they have no plane.

This difference in views on war and historical policy resulted in differences in the assessment of the origins of World War II. There is no English journalist who did not admit after the war that the British "guarantee" given to us on March 31, 1939, was a diplomatic maneuver to defend British national interests. The Poles, on the other hand, sincerely believed that England wanted to save us completely selflessly, out of the goodness of its heart, out of sympathy for us, out of idealism.

Let me repeat: on September 3, 1939, Great Britain declared war on the Reich because it had set itself the goal of destroying, by any means necessary, the growing European power that threatened it. The German attack on Poland was therefore not the reason why Great Britain declared war on Germany, but only a pretext. Great Britain did not wage war for Poland, but for its own national interests.

Let's not be naive children. Believing that soldiers of the 8th Army, dressed in shorts and long leggings, were shooting at Germans in some African desert in 1942 in defense of "Polish Gdańsk" is ridiculous. British airmen did not die for Gdańsk in 1940, nor did British sailors in the Atlantic, nor did infantrymen torn to shreds by machine gun fire on the beaches of Normandy.

Once again, Stanisław Mackiewicz. This is how he described how naively Poles viewed their alliance with Great Britain during World War II. "Hitler invaded Poland. Fortunately, however, brotherly France and hyper-altruistic England began to rescue us. Unfortunately, after some time, pro-Hitler pigs such as Pétain and Laval took over in brotherly France, but English altruism continues. Everything will be fine, as long as Poland perseveres without Quisling, because that will automatically discourage England from continuing to save us, as proof of our ingratitude. It is also important that we convince the world that it was we ourselves, without persuasion or help from England and France, who decided to resist Hitler, because this increases the world's admiration for our heroism, and this admiration is the reason for the outbreak of this war, which is a war fought in defense of Polish freedom and independence. Today, in hindsight, everyone will consider this to be utter nonsense.

All of this is absolutely true, except for the last sentence. To this day, many Poles do not consider this to be nonsense, but rather their perception of World War II. Even today, you can meet people who believe that between 1939 and 1945, Great Britain fought on the seas, oceans, and land solely in defense of Poland. And that it was Beck, with his unyielding attitude—like Private Dolas from that awful communist film—who started World War II.

Meanwhile, the war had long been decided. It would have broken out anyway. And Beck's nonchalance only caused its first major battle to sweep through the Republic of Poland instead of France. If World War II had indeed been fought for Poland's independence, Great Britain would have suffered its most spectacular defeat as a result.

in its long history. For six years, it bled itself dry fighting Hitler, spending billions of pounds, and the country for whose freedom it fought emerged from the war oppressed.

It would not even have been a defeat, it would have been a catastrophe. Look at the famous photo of Winston Churchill slumped in a wicker chair next to Joseph Stalin and Franklin Roosevelt at the Yalta Conference. The British prime minister certainly does not look like a loser there.

During World War II, we were an instrument in the hands of Great Britain, a tool that, once it broke down and was no longer needed, was indifferently discarded. To this day, many Poles are proud of this. Winston Churchill said: "I am not Prime Minister of His Majesty's Government to destroy the country, but to protect it." Could Beck say something like that about himself?

The decisive evidence that leaves no doubt that Great Britain deliberately lured Poland into a trap in 1939 and wanted to destroy it is the case of Hans von Herwarth. He was the secretary of the German embassy in Moscow, a very decent man and an opponent of Adolf Hitler's ideology. The day after the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact was signed, on the morning of August 24, 1939, he met American chargé d'affaires Charles Bohlen while out walking.

As the two men strolled along, Herwarth dictated the contents of the secret protocol to the American. That same day, the embassy sent it in an encrypted telegram to the State Department in Washington. There is little doubt that a day or two later, the British and French already knew about it. The latter, in fact, used their own source. On August 25, the French ambassador in Berlin, Robert Coulondre, learned about the planned partition of Poland. The information came from the entourage of the head of the Reich Chancellery, Hans Lammers.

Despite this, the French and British did not deign to inform the Poles of this "minor detail." What is more, when Ambassador Juliusz Łukasiewicz asked French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet directly about this matter, he merely replied that the fate of the Baltic states had been decided in Moscow. France allegedly had no information about the agreements between Germany and the Soviets regarding Poland. This was, of course, a lie.

Why did our "allies" not inform us about the German-Soviet pact targeting the Republic of Poland? There can only be one answer: fear of Poland's capitulation. The French and British feared that news of the planned joint Soviet-German attack would cause Poland to consider all resistance futile and, at the last minute, capitulate to Germany. Western leaders believed that even Beck and Śmigły-Rydz were not so crazy as to get involved in a war with two neighbors more powerful than themselves. As students of Piłsudski, they must have remembered the Marshal's warning that Poland would have to fight such a war on Saski Square.

So if Poland had capitulated at the last minute, the whole elaborate plan of London and Paris, which consisted of provoking Hitler to attack the East and embroiling him in a war in that part of the continent, would have come to nothing. God forbid that in the fall of 1939, the Wehrmacht would have taken on the French instead of the Poles...

"Having familiarized himself with the technical condition of our army and the shortcomings of our air force, General Ironside came to the conclusion that war with Germany was beyond the capabilities of the Polish army, and at a conference with Śmigły-Rydz, he demanded that Poland enter into an alliance with the USSR," wrote Władysław Studnicki about the July inspection visit of representatives of the British General Staff to Poland.

He went on to report: “Śmigły-Rydz was outraged by this proposal, exclaiming: ‘Hand Poland over to the Soviets? Better to come to an agreement with Hitler!’ Then Ironside, fearing the latter alternative, changed his position. He emphasized that Poland would not be abandoned, that the Allies would give it effective help.

The question arises as to why Ironside, having learned about the state of our army, did not declare: you and we are not ready. Make concessions to Germany now, agree to Hitler's demands, and we will give you the means to rearm [for the future conflict]. Great Britain did not do so because it feared that Poland would then join the Axis camp. After all, the Polish-German war was not about Gdańsk or the motorway, but about which side Poland would take in the global conflict.

Today, we know of a significant statement made by Neville Chamberlain during those grim days when the fate of Poland and millions of its citizens was sealed. "The most important thing is for Poland to fight...," said the prime minister. "Anything that could undermine Poland's confidence is highly undesirable... Britain wants to see Poland fighting and keep its morale high." It did.

Chapter 25

Józef Beck's great bluff

Our Don Quixote, Józef Beck, triumphed in the spring of 1939. He believed that, thanks to his cleverness, cunning, and determination, he had just assembled a powerful European bloc that would temper the unruly corporal Hitler. He, an ordinary artillery colonel! Now, leading European leaders – Prime Ministers Neville Chamberlain and Édouard Daladier – were vying for his favor. And he was putting them in their place like schoolboys. The Republic had finally achieved the status of a superpower he had dreamed of. And with it, he too was powerful. Unfortunately, as we know, it did not last long. The collision with reality was very painful.

A year later, when the Republic lay in ruins and Beck was interned in Romania, he was moved to tears every time he listened to the radio. When the British king spoke, only the English, French, and Polish national anthems were played. These were the things that mattered to the last head of Polish diplomacy when the Germans were carrying out mass executions on the streets of his country and the Soviets were deporting hundreds of thousands of people to Siberia.

"If we had done what the Czechs did," he wrote in a note drafted in Romania entitled "What every decent Pole should think," "that is, surrendered Gdańsk and Pomerania without a fight, we would have become vassals of Germany. Therefore, despite criticism of particular issues or individuals, Poles have the right to hold their heads high, waiting for others to repay their debt."

Perhaps he could walk with his head held high in Romania (although not really). However, when he wrote this, the citizens he left behind in the country at the mercy of the occupiers were already facing serious problems. For example, in the Gestapo prison on Młyńska Street in Poznań, representatives of the Polish elite were beheaded with a guillotine. Poland did not become a German vassal, but it did lose its independence to the Germans. Which is better? As Beck's statement shows, this is something that can be debated.

Meanwhile, it is spring 1939. Let us try to put ourselves in our minister's shoes for a moment. Let us try to understand his motives, try to reconstruct his reasoning, which led him to provoke Hitler into attacking Poland in the first place. Why did this happen? The fundamental question in this matter is: Did Beck really believe that the French and British would rush to Poland's aid? That the Republic of Poland, attacked by Germany, would receive any real support from the "allies" he had chosen for it?

It is well known that Beck, remembering the Marshal's warnings, had a very low opinion of the guarantees given by France and the combat capabilities of its people. He believed that Poland could not count on France. This conviction was reinforced in March 1936, when Hitler challenged Paris and occupied the Rhineland, which had been demilitarized under the Treaty of Versailles. Our foreign minister then declared to France that if it decided to take up arms against Germany, Poland would honor its alliance commitments and attack the Reich from the east. This offer caused outright horror in Paris. The French showed such great fear of the possibility of this confrontation that it caused distaste in Warsaw. It was the ultimate proof that France could not be relied upon.

As late as the summer of 1938, Józef Beck, considering the possibility of a Polish-German war, said to his colleagues: "These matters give me no peace, I lie awake at night

with my thoughts, and even if we went ‘all out’ against Hitler, who would support us? They would sell us like a loaf of bread for a penny.”

Another characteristic opinion was expressed in March 1939, six months before the outbreak of war, by Juliusz Łukasiewicz, the Polish ambassador in Paris: “After the experiences of the last twenty years, during which neither England nor France not only failed to fulfill a single international obligation, but were also unable to defend their own interests properly, it is absolutely impossible for any of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as on the opposite side – Berlin and Rome, take any English proposal seriously until England takes action that will undoubtedly and categorically confirm its determination to actively jeopardize its relations with Germany."

It can be assumed that these words were not only an expression of our diplomat's personal opinion, but also the opinion of the entire Ministry of Foreign Affairs. So what changed in mid-1939 that Beck, confident in the alliance with the West, decided to challenge Hitler? According to the most widespread opinion, while our minister did not really believe in France, he was convinced of the power and determination of Great Britain. He considered the agreement with London, which he concluded in early April 1939, to be a guarantee that the West would indeed come to Poland's defense. He naively believed that the word given by the proud lords from the Thames was worth more than the word of the cowards from the Seine.

It is very likely, but it is worth noting a certain characteristic scene. When Józef Beck had already signed the pact with Halifax and was returning to Warsaw by train, somewhere near Brussels, he summoned his secretary, Paweł Starzeński, to his compartment.

– "Mr. Paweł, will they fight?" he asked anxiously.

– "They will fight. But with what?" replied Starzeński.

Apparently, Beck was clearly gloomy at that moment. However, according to other sources, this mood immediately passed and was replaced by euphoria.

Was it just a moment when Beck had doubts, or did he feel deep down that British bills were worthless? We will probably never know. However, after reviewing many documents and statements made by Beck during that period, it seems to me that our foreign minister did indeed believe that an alliance with Great Britain was somewhat better than an alliance with France. He considered this alliance to be a certain strengthening of Poland's position in the event of war, but in reality he did not associate any great military hopes with it. Rather, he believed that it would be a means of preventing war rather than a means of winning it.

Sam Beck himself spoke of guarantees as a "preventative measure." He believed that the creation of a strong French-British-Polish bloc would corner Hitler and deter him from going to war. That the Führer would come to his senses, remember World War I, and, threatened with war on two fronts, simply abandon his expansionist plans. That he would bow to Beck.

As Juliusz Łukasiewicz, the Polish ambassador to Paris at the time, said years later, Beck assumed that "Hitler is willing to take what he can through threats and blackmail, but will back down from a large-scale armed conflict." The head of diplomacy himself told his secretary Starzeński: "We had a choice to join forces with Germany against Russia. But Poland needs peace. I am going to London to preserve peace."

In mid-1939, he wrote to Wieniawa: “During my visit to Hitler in Berchtesgaden, I noticed a dangerous change in this man, whom, based on concrete evidence, I had reason to consider in 1934 as a rare example of common sense in foreign policy in Germany. Too easy successes resulting from the incompetence and indecisiveness of his counterparts, both large and small, have led this man, with whom one could still talk sensibly about European politics a year ago, to a state that now directly threatens our interests.”

Here is another characteristic statement he made on March 24 during a briefing for his colleagues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “This enemy is a troublesome factor,” said Beck, “because it seems to be losing its moderation in thought and action. It may regain this moderation when it encounters a decisive stance, which has not happened so far. The powerful were humble towards him, and the weak capitulated in advance [...]. With nine divisions, the Germans are now parading throughout Europe. With this force, no one will take Poland."

He conveyed a similar thought a week later in London in a conversation with Eden. "In response to my question," wrote the British politician, "Beck expressed the opinion that the result of his visit and the agreement reached in London would be to deter Germany from further steps against Poland. The Germans will be angry and will make a lot of noise. But they can do nothing more. Beck personally believes that the efficiency of the German army has been greatly exaggerated."

According to Beck, Hitler became emboldened because the "rotten" West indulged him and gave in at every turn. However, Józef Beck, leader of what he considered to be a great power, Poland, did not intend to be intimidated. He was convinced that if he stamped his foot (this stamping was to be the conclusion of an alliance with London), the "ridiculous German corporal" – who achieved all his successes through bluff and insolence – would tuck his tail between his legs and retreat. All well and good, but to pursue such a policy, one must have a powerful army behind one. Beck did not have one. Instead of scaring Hitler, he only enraged him. He overestimated his own strength and underestimated that of his opponent. Thus, he made a mistake for which, in high politics, one pays the highest price.

When, in September 1939, our head of diplomacy crossed the border with Romania, he reportedly snapped irritably at those around him: "I thought I had a hundred divisions, but I had shit." If he really thought so, it reflects even worse on him. How could a foreign minister who threw his nation into a life-and-death struggle with a powerful enemy fail to realize what forces that nation had at its disposal?

This final Polish-German showdown can be compared to a game of poker, with Poland's independence at stake. On one side of the green-clothed table sits Józef Beck, on the other Adolf Hitler. The German bids aggressively, but the Pole is convinced that he is bluffing. That he does not have the cards to win. All Beck has to do is keep his nerves of steel and not give in, and Hitler will have no choice but to say "fold."

The problem was that Beck was actually bluffing. He led the entire game with only a measly pair of jacks, i.e., ephemeral agreements with the French and British. Strong on paper, but worthless on the battlefield. However, he thought that this would be enough for Hitler, that the German leader would not be able to withstand the pressure of the game, would break off play and withdraw. So when Hitler shouted "I call!", Beck was shocked. It turned out that the pair of jacks was useless, and Hitler laid a royal flush on the table. And then, to finish off his opponent, he pulled a joker out of his sleeve. It was a red joker... Beck's big game was lost. Poland lost with him.

When Józef Beck's colleagues pressed him in the spring of 1939, asking what would happen if Germany did not back down and started a war, Beck replied with disarming honesty: "It's clear, we will fight." Just like that. Poland would enter into total war with the most powerful military machine in the world, as if it were nothing. The astonishing recklessness and lack of deeper reflection with which our last foreign minister made this historic decision is striking. Was he so sure that no war would break out, or did he believe that the British would start bombing Berlin in our defense? I am inclined to believe the former. One of his favorite sayings, which he deigned to

colleagues, was: "As long as I am foreign minister, there will be no war in Poland."

His boastful opinions are surprising, given that Beck was an artillery officer. Even if he had commanded a battery on the front line, such carelessness would have cost him his rank. And what about when he was deciding the fate of a country with a population of 35 million? The aforementioned British account is characteristic, according to which Beck said that he made the decision to accept London's guarantee between shaking the ash off his cigarette. A decision about the life and death of his own nation...

Was it impossible to predict that all this would end in disaster? It was possible, and there is evidence to prove it. Although few people remember today, in 1939 there was still a possibility that the war would start in southern Europe. Great Britain tried to provoke Germany into striking Romania first, offering that country guarantees of independence similar to those given to Poland. However, Bucharest was not fooled. The country's diplomats made every effort, putting all their skills and energy into averting this terrible threat from their homeland.

The private notes of King Carol II of Romania, which he wrote in his diary during those decisive days, are now known. On August 22, he wrote: "I dream that the Poles will be the first to be attacked." A day later, he added: "The situation looks increasingly dangerous, including ours. This is the conclusion we have reached: it is in Romania's interest that the Anglo-French forces emerge victorious and that Romania be protected from war for as long as possible. Neutrality for as long as possible, in order to preserve fresh forces and, if circumstances allow, to intervene when it is advantageous to do so."

The monarch visited Poland before the war. He received the Order of the White Eagle and assumed honorary command of the 57th Greater Poland Infantry Regiment, which from then on bore the name of Charles II, King of Romania. It is a pity that his infantrymen did not chase away Śmigły-Rydz and Beck, and then crown their patron as King of Poland. As can be seen from the writings of this sensible man, such a monarchist coup d'état would have saved the lives of several million Poles.

But jokes aside. It seems that Beck did not fully understand the magnitude of the game he was playing. How high the stakes were. He behaved like a naughty boy playing with a real revolver, thinking it was a plastic toy. In late spring and summer, he proposed some compromise plans to Hitler concerning Gdańsk, according to which Poland and Germany were to expel the League of Nations from the city and take over its condominium...

It was as if he did not understand that this was not about Gdańsk, but about whether Poland would side with Hitler or against him. Whether it would help him realize his plans or become an obstacle. Friend or foe? Hitler had been asking the Poles this question since 1934. Beck initially misled him for several years and evaded the question, but finally gave his answer in early April 1939, accepting British guarantees and entering into an alliance system aimed at the Reich. That was the end. This decision meant war with Germany.

On April 7, exactly one day after Beck signed the mutual guarantees, the Völkischer Beobachter ran a large headline on its front page: “Poland breaks with Piłsudski’s policy.” From that day on, the German press’s previously favorable tone toward Poland changed completely. Once again, we became a nation of "barbarians," once again we were "racial mongrels," and once again we were depicted as lice in caricatures. In the Third Reich, propaganda always took action as the vanguard of the Wehrmacht.

Although Beck was receiving more and more disturbing signals, they did not seem to make much of an impression on him. He decided, as it was said at the time in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "show Germany his teeth" and clearly revelled in the fact that he had outwitted Hitler. Poland – holding our childish comparison – resembled at that time

a reckless boy who teases a rabid chained dog with a stick, not seeing that the seriously strained chain is about to break at any moment.

Beck proudly claimed that he was fulfilling the Marshal's political will. In reality, as we now know, he was doing the opposite.

"Beck reverently recalls the guidelines that Piłsudski instructed him to follow after his death," wrote Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz. "It must be objectively admitted that Beck not only failed to follow Piłsudski's maxims, but pursued a policy that was completely contrary to them, right up to the final catastrophe. Piłsudski's instructions, as quoted by Beck, were as follows:

1. The most important issue in Polish politics is our relationship with our neighbors.
2. Politics should be closely aligned with our actual capabilities.
3. We should direct our policy in such a way as to enter the approaching war as late as possible.

Beck ignored all three points and did everything the opposite way around. It was as if he wanted to spite Piłsudski. Let us give the floor to Stanisław Mackiewicz:

"1. Beck pursued what I would describe as an 'exotic' policy, a system of 'exotic alliances', as I call alliances with countries for which the existence or non-existence of Poland is not particularly important, thus violating Piłsudski's instruction regarding the primacy of relations with our neighbors in foreign policy.

2. Lacking real power, Beck imagined himself to have it and played foreign policy as if he did, but such a game, as the actor says, must be over by eleven.

3. He was the first to bring Poland into the war, exposing it to the first strike by Hitler's troops, fresh and untired by any military action, a strike that everyone knew would be deadly.

Meanwhile, the British and French, in whom Beck had placed such enormous faith, were already sitting in the corridors of the Kremlin and seeking to bring the Soviets into the anti-German alliance. It is surprising that no red warning lights came on for Beck at that time.

Of course, he understood how dangerous it would be to let the Red Army into Poland, and he strongly protested against such ideas. At the same time, however, he told his London partners that "we will not interfere with any attempts at agreement between England and France on the one hand and the Soviets on the other." This statement is one of the most curious aspects of his already rather curious policy.

The anti-German agreement between the West and the Soviet Union had to be based on military cooperation. If the Red Army was to fight the Wehrmacht, it would not be in Antarctica or South Africa, but in Poland. This would mean Stalin's conquest and the Sovietization of our country. The victory of the coalition of Western countries and the Soviets over Germany simply had to end with Yalta. After all, the West would have to pay Stalin something for his participation in the war.

The fact that our foreign minister did not see or understand the danger lurking in the alliance between the West and the Soviet Union weighs heavily on his reputation. The fact that he declared *désintéressement* on behalf of Poland in this matter seems almost unbelievable. This was an issue that Poland not only cared about – it was a matter of life and death for Poland.

Of course, Beck could have deluded himself into thinking that if the Soviets were drawn into the Anglo-Polish-French coalition, he would be able to influence London and Paris to ensure that Polish interests were not violated by the Bolsheviks. Let's say that, at a pinch, this might have worked in 1939, while Poland still mattered to the West as an ally. But it was clear that as soon as the Polish-German war began, the Republic of Poland would no longer have a say. It would probably quickly cease to exist, and the British and French would have a completely free hand and would begin to court Stalin even more vigorously.

Relying on Prime Minister Chamberlain, who was "cautious and skeptical of the Soviets," did not make much sense either. His government was not eternal, and the ambitious Winston Churchill was already preparing to take his place, openly stating that "an effective defensive front in Eastern Europe is unthinkable without Russia's participation."

Meanwhile, on April 28, 1939, Adolf Hitler gave a fiery speech in the Reichstag, in which he renounced the 1934 non-aggression pact with Poland. He stated that he had tried to do everything to regulate relations with his eastern neighbor. He believed that Poland had the right to access the sea and that both nations should live side by side in friendship. In exchange for the alliance, he only wanted consent to the incorporation of Gdańsk into the Reich and the construction of a motorway. Unfortunately, Poland did not accept this offer.

He stated that by entering into an alliance with Great Britain, the Republic of Poland had rejected his offer of reconciliation. This meant that if Germany were to attack any third country now – the word “France” was not mentioned – Warsaw would stab them in the back. According to the German dictator, the British guarantees were therefore contrary to the agreement signed five years earlier by Poland and Germany. "Therefore, I believe that the agreement concluded at the time by myself and Marshal Piłsudski has been unilaterally violated by Poland. And therefore, it is no longer valid." And another important, ominous signal: in his speech, Hitler did not attack the Soviets, as was his custom.

Beck responded to Hitler on May 5 in the Sejm. His speech would go down in history: “I consider it my duty to add here that the manner and form of the exhaustive talks conducted [by me] in London add special value to the agreement [with Great Britain]. I would like the Polish public to know that I encountered not only a deep understanding of general European political issues on the part of British statesmen, but also an attitude towards our country that allowed me to discuss all important issues openly and with confidence, without ambiguity or doubt. [...]

Parallel declarations by French political leaders state that Paris and Warsaw agree that the effectiveness of our defense agreement must not be weakened by changes in the international situation, but rather that this agreement should be one of the most important factors in the political structure of Europe.

Effectiveness? That agreement wasn't worth a penny! And then there was his naive belief in "exhaustive" talks. It's truly unbelievable. For an old hand on the European diplomatic scene to spout such naive nonsense. When you think that such a man had been foreign minister since 1932, it is surprising that he did not plunge the country entrusted to him by the Marshal into ruin until 1939.

"When I receive no response to our proposal, made on March 26, to jointly guarantee the existence and rights of the Free City, and then learn that it has been considered a rejection of negotiations, I have to ask myself, what is this really about? Is it about the freedom of the German population of Gdańsk, which is not threatened, or about matters of prestige, or about pushing Poland away from the Baltic Sea, from which Poland cannot be pushed away!"

Indeed, created a few months later as a result of Józef Beck's "outstanding" policy, the Generalgouvernement für die besetzten polnischen Gebiete had enormous access to the sea...

And finally, the most famous passage: "Peace is a precious and desirable thing. Our generation, bloodied by wars, certainly deserves peace. But peace, like almost everything else in this world, has its price, a high but measurable one. We in Poland do not know the concept of peace for

at any cost. There is only one thing in the lives of people, nations, and states that is priceless. That thing is honor.

After his last words, applause and cheers erupted. Schoolchildren, who had been gathered in front of loudspeakers set up in gyms that day, also became enthusiastic. Beck instantly became a national idol. The next day, excited, patriotic boarding school girls cut his photo out of newspapers and placed it by their bedside lamps. Once again, the cliché so beloved by Poles prevailed, and common sense lost.

I will repeat after Jerzy Łojek: in 1939, peace had to be maintained at all costs. Honor is, of course, a beautiful thing, but it occurs in relations between men. In international politics, not only does such a concept not exist, but it has no raison d'être. Excuse me, a minor correction: in the politics of all countries in the world except one – Poland.

To this day, Poles have trouble understanding what politics, that nasty field of human activity, is all about. Poles could not and cannot understand that state leaders are not concerned with fighting for "honor," "justice," or "truth." They cannot understand that it is the sacred duty of leaders to fight for the national interest, for the security of the state and its citizens. Józef Beck betrayed this cardinal principle in 1939. Was honor—which was to be compromised by agreeing to the German takeover of a German city—really worth the murder of several million Poles? Was it worth the destruction of Warsaw, the loss of half of the territory and independence for sixty years?

Worse still, when speaking in the Sejm about the possibility of war with Germany, the minister realized that, since matters had gone so far, his bluff-based strategy of "deterring Hitler" had failed. If the guarantees he so eagerly accepted from perfidious Albion were indeed not going to guarantee peace but lead to armed confrontation, then his decision was a terrible mistake. It seems that even Beck must have understood this. It was no coincidence that when, after his speech in the Sejm, he found a pile of congratulatory telegrams on his desk, he flew into a rage and threw them forcefully on the floor.

"Beck's speech was received with great enthusiasm, shared by his former opponents, and the entire nation, which had long distrusted Beck, now expressed its admiration for this speech," wrote Cat-Mackiewicz. "And yet this speech was a rejection of Beck's entire policy, an admission by Beck that he had pursued a bad, false, and disastrous policy. Beck turned the tombstone of his policy into a pedestal for himself."

The director of the Foreign Ministry's cabinet, Michał Łubieński, told him at the time: "You are starting to pursue popular politics, and that is always a very bad sign in foreign policy." He believed that public opinion "always demands that the government do something stupid." He was right. It was a warning to Beck, who, however, did not listen and, after his disastrous speech on May 5, instead of backing down, instead of trying to save what could still be saved, continued to push Poland toward the abyss.

Let us give the floor to publicist Rafał A. Ziemkiewicz: "Yes, we all agree on one thing: his speech about honor was very successful. It is a pity that the man did not become a reciter, but a politician. And that the whim of a dictator put him in a position far beyond his intellectual capabilities. Nations do not have "honor." Nations have vital interests, which Mr. Beck completely ignored in the name of honor, not so much for Poland, but for his clique, which for so long and intensely inflated itself with imaginary "superpower status" until it became a hostage to its own PR. And in the end, it preferred to bring about the destruction of the state and the nation rather than admit to the failure of its policy.

Perhaps, however, Poland's fate was influenced by certain individual characteristics of the minister. Unfortunately, Beck had a certain flaw in his character—an extremely inflated ego—and attached excessive importance to appearances and personal grievances. "From studying documents relating to this

Unfortunately, we have a sad impression of this era, wrote Mackiewicz. Beck is most interested in who is polite to him and who is rude. Beck is hypersensitive in terms of his ego and prestige.

He cites an example of how he took offense at France because the head of French diplomacy did not wait for him on the platform in Paris. Or how he burst with pride and strutted like a peacock when he was told in Berlin that the riflemen of the Wehrmacht honor guard recognized him as a fellow soldier. "This Pole must be an officer, because he looks the army in the eye," they reportedly said after the ceremony. And Beck boasted about it for weeks to come.

"They invite him to London," wrote Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz. "Beck, in keeping with his ridiculous character, calls our ambassador in London, Edward Raczyński, to ask whether Eden will be at the station when he arrives in the British capital. As if there were no more important things at a time when Poland was under threat! "But we know how much importance Beck attached to how and who would welcome him. His book *Ostatni raport (The Last Report)* is filled with stories about how the Swedes welcomed him with a detachment of the royal guard on horseback, how the reception in Italy left nothing to be desired in terms of courtesy, how the Germans presented the most magnificent honor guard, and how the minister in France did not come to the platform. So when the English found out that Beck was asking about Eden on the platform, they not only sent Eden to him, but also laid out a red carpet from the carriage in which Beck had arrived to the very exit of the station. Beck was delighted. Of course, he did not understand that he was walking on this red carpet towards the catastrophe of Poland.

A very interesting psychological portrait of Beck was sketched by his colleague in the government, Minister Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski. "Beck succumbed to harmful delusions or illusions even in important matters, especially when they harmonized with his own theories and political postulates," he wrote. "Over the years of managing an important and powerful state department, certain distortions or mental deviations accumulate in the personality of the head, alongside routine and experience, caused both by the praise of those around him and the gradual disappearance of his sense of self-criticism." Similar symptoms can also be observed in the public speeches and activities of Minister Beck, especially from mid-1935 onwards. Beck was increasingly under the illusion that he knew everything better than his entire team of professional colleagues. Under these circumstances, mistakes were bound to multiply.

Unfortunately, that's the kind of minister we had. And people like that find it difficult to admit their mistakes.

How much platitude, how much disdain and lack of responsibility for the state is contained in the words spoken by Beck on September 4 in a conversation with Spanish MP Luis de Pedroso. "Poland is broken, but its honor will survive. We are counting on our allies, whom I sought and found." At that moment, Stańczyk from Jan Matejko's painting should have hidden his face in his hands and wept bitterly. God, have mercy on Poland, which chooses such leaders.

—

Chapter 26

Strong, united, unprepared

Polish leaders should have realized almost immediately that something was wrong, that our new "allies" had no intention of fulfilling their commitments to us. When attempts to give the alliance any concrete framework after the signing of the Beck-Halifax Pact ended in failure,

After intense Polish efforts, on May 19, as a result of arduous staff talks in Paris, the French agreed (with great resistance and reluctance) to launch an offensive against Germany on the fifteenth day after the start of mobilization in their country. However, the French army made the entry into force of the military protocol conditional on the signing of an appropriate political agreement. The French government refused to sign it. It signed it... on September 4, 1939. The head of the French General Staff, Maurice Gamelin, received the Polish military delegation, led by General Tadeusz Kasprzycki, with surprise. He conducted the talks in such a way as to avoid reaching any agreement, and signed the military agreement "with disgust." He believed that if one was serious about fighting Germany on two fronts, it was obviously necessary to come to an agreement with the Soviets, and not with some ridiculous Poland. When he learned that his government had refused to sign an agreement with Poland political situation, he was delighted.

The memoirs of the French ambassador in Warsaw, Léon Noël, say a lot about the mood in France at the turn of 1938 and 1939. Already in October, he wrote to Paris that "The most important thing is to remove the automatic nature of the aid commitments we have taken on, which could deprive the French government of any freedom of decision on the day Poland finds itself at war with Germany and force us to participate in that war." However, the then head of diplomacy, Georges Bonnet, reassured him that "our agreements with Poland contain sufficient leeway to protect our country from war in any case."

"Regarding the intentions of the ally," wrote historian Jan Ciałowicz, "Śmigły-Rydz only wanted answers as to when France would take serious action against Germany and what its initial intentions were. The question of whether the French army would leave its borders and attack Germany sounded very cautious. This cautious, rather timid question encapsulated the entire character of the Polish commander-in-chief: softness, a lack of a firm, masculine stance towards an ally from whom maximum offensive effort should have been demanded in the event of the entire German power descending on Poland. Śmigły immediately placed the Polish delegation in the role of a timid, modest supplicant.

The Polish government was well aware – contrary to what its representatives later claimed – that the hope for a French attack after two weeks was illusory. And yet, Polish operational plans were drawn up on the assumption that the French would move. It is truly difficult to explain this today. It seems that these gentlemen simply pushed uncomfortable facts out of their minds and closed their eyes to reality. It was Śmigły-Rydz who pioneered Polish wishful thinking during World War II, which was later perfected by Sikorski, Bór-Komorowski, and Mikołajczyk.

What is more, during two meetings with representatives of the military command of our "allies," the French and British stubbornly blocked any possibility of concrete staff arrangements. Apart from vague assurances such as "We will help, everything will be fine!,"

our officers learned nothing from their partners, with whom they were supposed to wage war, about what such cooperation would actually look like.

During his stay in London, Józef Beck was shown the aircraft carrier *Ark Royal* and the battleship *Nelson*. Then he was taken on a ride on a destroyer. All this must have made quite an impression, but apart from the fleet, the British had nothing at the time. They had no compulsory military service, no modern air force, and no armored weapons at all. We had better ones.

Why, then, did Beck not ask how the British, completely unprepared for war, were supposed to fulfill the alliance commitments they had just made? He did not ask whether England would send us soldiers and planes, he did not ask about loans, he did not ask whether it would bomb Germany. All of this was clearly unimportant to him. And yet, as we know from what he said on his return from London, deep down he must have realized that London really had nothing to offer us.

Is it any wonder, then, that the British themselves were surprised that Poland accepted the guarantee offered to it in the House of Commons? “This guarantee was given to Poland in haste,” Anthony Eden wrote candidly, “without any concrete plan for Britain and France to come to its aid. It was difficult to imagine that the chiefs of staff had enough time before Chamberlain's declaration to examine the strategic possibilities, which were not very encouraging anyway. The occupation of Czechoslovakia significantly increased the power of the Axis, both in terms of material and geography."

What seriously concerned the British politician did not interest Beck. Colonel Antoni Szymański, military attaché at our embassy in Berlin, recalled how he boarded the train in Germany on which Beck was returning from London and painted a bleak picture of the possibility of a Polish-German conflict. "Beck listened with interest to the details I gave him about the Reich's military preparations," wrote Szymański. "However, he had a preconceived opinion on the whole matter. Whether this was influenced by the talks in London or by his personal convictions, I do not know, but when Minister Beck said goodbye to me in Frankfurt, he jokingly, but with conviction, said to me in a cavalier manner: ‘You know, I’m not afraid of horses that kick.’”

"The English give 'guarantees'. Colonel or Lieutenant Colonel Beck should have asked the English right away what these guarantees consisted of," wrote Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz. "It was clear to everyone that Chamberlain's guarantees would provoke a German attack on us. So where were the planes, ships, tanks, military equipment, and money, money above all, with which the British would 'guarantee' us help in the event of a German invasion of Poland? But Beck was so non-military and anti-military in his thinking that he did not even ask the British about these matters. They guarantee independence, so they guarantee it, but what this guarantee consists of is their business.

It is hard to believe that such a foreign minister could have existed. After all, it was clear that the English did not even have any roads by which they could deliver aid to us, and anyway, they had nothing with which they could help us except money, and the English maliciously refused to give us that, preferring to sink millions of pounds in China or elsewhere.

Beck was a certified officer, and even a private soldier had to understand that a war on two fronts against Germany required lengthy preparations, joint planning with the French and British, and communication systems that would allow for synchronized strikes against the enemy. In addition, it would be necessary to determine how to provide specific assistance in terms of manpower, ammunition, weapons, and equipment, i.e., to designate and secure transport routes. However, Polish generals attempting to arrange this with their "allies" met with resistance.

Shouldn't this have aroused their suspicion that someone was trying to pull the wool over our eyes? It is sad how little regard the French and British had for the intelligence of our officers, since they did not even keep up the pretense of suggesting that they intended to help us. What is even sadder is that they were right. The commanders of the Polish army, having received no concrete information from our allies, still plunged us into war with Germany, relying on vague promises. While Beck could still hope that his alliance with Great Britain would prevent the outbreak of war, the role of the generals was not to make political calculations, but to prepare the country for war as best they could.

According to Andrzej Wielowieyski, our generals should have forced the French and British to provide us with concrete assistance and make real commitments. Even resorting to threats and blackmail. After all, it was a matter of national survival. “However, there is no evidence that the Poles exerted such decisive pressure,” wrote Wielowieyski. “They probably thought that it would be contrary to their sense of honor, and they hoped, without conviction, that their allies would honor their commitments.” If Wielowieyski is right and our senior commanders really thought this way, then it is difficult to even call them misguided knights. They were – excuse the colloquial expression – simply bunglers.

All over the world, the military profession is treated like any other profession. It is very prestigious, but still just a profession. It is no better or worse than that of a lawyer, doctor, or architect. Let's take the latter example. When an architect receives an order for a building, they must first examine the site where it is to be built. They must take the appropriate measurements and calculations, check what budget and building materials are available. If they realize that under the given conditions the building cannot be successful, that it will collapse with a bang immediately after construction, they simply will not take on the task.

Our generals were instructed by the government to prepare Poland for war with Germany on the basis of an alliance with France and Great Britain. To this end, they held a series of meetings with their "allies," which ended in complete failure. Even a moderately intelligent corporal would have realized that in this situation, waging war would inevitably lead to disaster and the occupation of the country. So did our generals inform the government of this? Did they – sticking to our architectural comparison – conclude that this building was bound to collapse and that there was no point in constructing it? Not at all. They slung their shovels and pickaxes over their shoulders and set about building an apartment block on quicksand. This was no longer incompetence – it was a crime.

“[The blame for the defeat] lies both with the military and with the recklessness of our domestic, economic, and foreign policies. In conditions of complete unpreparedness, it was impossible to engage in this war,” wrote Deputy Foreign Minister Mirosław Arciszewski on September 8, 1939.

After the 1939 campaign, Edward Śmigły-Rydz admitted with disarming honesty:
"When I started the war, I understood very well that it would necessarily be lost on the Polish front." This is confirmed by the account of the Marshal's conversation with Primate August Hlond, which took place before the outbreak of war: "In view of the enormous superiority of the German army and its technical resources, we will be defeated in regular warfare and will only be able to continue the fight in the form of guerrilla warfare," said the Marshal.

In his conversation with the hierarch, he was much more honest than in his earlier post-war statement. The latter was probably intended to justify his recklessness. However, he told the primate bluntly that France was also ill-prepared for military action and that its potential was too small to effectively oppose the Reich. "As a result," he said, "it will also be defeated."

Deputy Chief of Staff Colonel Józef Jaklicz expressed his opinion about the upcoming war with soldierly bluntness: "We're going to get our asses kicked!" Chief of Staff

General Wacław Stachiewicz... This raises one question: if you knew we were going to get our asses kicked, why did you get us into this war?

Already during British-French staff talks at the turn of April and May, representatives of both armies stated that they would not be able to provide Poland with any assistance. It was assumed that while the Republic would be bleeding to death fighting the Germans, the French and British would "limit themselves to defensive actions." "This is all very telling, as it shows how little value a given word had – something that would have been difficult to imagine in the 19th century. The 20th century thus brought two revolutionary changes in the history of diplomacy – starting a war without declaring it and making fictitious alliance commitments," wrote Polish historian Marek Kornat. Of course, the French and British did not tell us that they would not come to our aid, so as not to weaken Poland's enthusiasm for fighting the Germans. However, it did not take a genius to realize that this alliance was a mockery.

Let us look at General Ironside's visit in July, which has already been mentioned several times. During his visit, the British general tried by all means to persuade the Poles to resist. To achieve this, he let his imagination run wild and, during meetings with our politicians and generals, he talked complete nonsense. Among other things, he rambled on about the possibility of part of the British air force coming to Poland, and even about an aircraft carrier being sent from England to Gdynia.

The latter would be absurd, because if war broke out, such a vessel would be immediately sunk by the Kriegsmarine, which had absolute superiority in the Baltic Sea. The British would have to be idiots to sacrifice such a valuable ship in this way. Undeterred, Ironside promised that half of the British army, concentrated in... Egypt, would come to Poland's aid.

"Perhaps we will come to you via the Black Sea," he said, winking at our generals, who were red-faced with excitement and twirling their mustaches.

Instead of grabbing the British bluffer by the scruff of his neck and putting him on the nearest train to Paris, our commanders were bursting with pride that they could chat with the chief of staff of the British Empire at a reception and fantasize together about jointly occupying Berlin two weeks after the outbreak of war. How it must have tickled their ambition. So much so that, in order to please the British, they were ready to jump into the fire with their entire nation. It is surprising how well the English understood the Polish psyche and how poorly the Poles understood the English psyche.

"The entire British Empire fleet and air force is behind us!" said Colonel Adam Koc excitedly in April 1939. If this officer, instead of writing silly OZN program declarations and inciting Poles against Jews, had taken his profession seriously, he would have understood that such words in the mouth of a military man were absurd. Great Britain could not, and indeed had no desire to, send a single ship or aircraft to Poland. And it did not.

"Unfortunately, instead of performing their professional duties, acting as a force of prudence and moderation, and preventing the war of 1939, our military leaders became the driving force behind national fervor and tragic exaltation," wrote Mackiewicz.

Let us return to the preparations for war and inter-alliance agreements. Not only did the negotiations with the French end in failure, but the negotiations in London also yielded no results. It was only after lengthy talks that the British reluctantly agreed to bomb German military targets (and civilian targets, if Germany did the same in Poland). However, our military was unable to achieve anything more.

Talks about loans for rearming the Polish Army went even worse. The Polish ambassador to London, Edward Raczyński, described them as "a nightmare, a never-ending torment." Beck himself wrote in his *Last Report*: "The negotiations conducted by Col. Koc

In London, they immediately became entangled in rather theoretical considerations about the monetary system, the statute of the Bank of Poland, etc., demonstrating that Sir John Simon, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Leith Ross were operating purely in financial terms, which did not correspond to the gravity of the situation and the principles of the Polish-English wartime alliance. As a result, the British proposals resembled purely banking discussions that might be possible in peacetime, and did not provide any basis for an agreement aimed at quickly strengthening the armed forces of our country. As a result, no agreement was reached.

Finally, on August 2, Great Britain deigned to grant Poland nine million pounds (we wanted sixty million), which was less than it had lent to Turkey at the time. Of course, this money could not be used. The same was true of the 430 million francs lent by Paris... on August 18.

Are you outraged? But the French and British would have to be out of their minds to give Poland any money. It would be like putting expensive furniture in a wooden house that we know is about to go up in flames. A wooden house whose thatched roof is already smoldering. It would be a waste of money. The loan negotiations were the next stage at which Śmigły-Rydz should have seen the red warning light.

But it didn't catch fire. And it was with such guarantees and such assurances from their allies that our leaders led Poland into World War II. A war in which it was supposed to wipe out a much more powerful and better equipped enemy. All it took was to take a train to Berlin on April 20, 1939, and watch the celebrations of Adolf Hitler's 50th birthday.

On that day, a parade unlike any the world had ever seen was held in the capital of the Reich. For half a day, 50,000 Wehrmacht soldiers marched in tight formation, their boots clattering, in front of Hitler and distinguished foreign guests. 50,000 Wehrmacht soldiers marched in tight formation, stomping their boots, nearly a thousand tanks and other military vehicles rumbled by, and 162 Luftwaffe planes flew overhead with the roar of their engines.

After the parade – which was intended to emphatically show the world the power Hitler had built up in just six years of rule – terrified diplomats from Western democracies began frantically sending telegrams to their capitals. As a result, Paris and London only became more convinced that everything must be done to divert the first strike of this powerful war machine away from themselves and direct it eastward. However, the steady beat of soldiers' hobnailed boots marching on Berlin's cobblestones apparently did not reach the Brühl Palace. If they had, perhaps Beck would have better understood who he was messing with and that he could expect no help against Germany from his beloved Englishmen.

It is humiliating that what our leaders failed to grasp was perfectly understood even by Benito Mussolini. A politician not only with rather nasty beliefs – which in this case is irrelevant – but also with a rather dull mind. And yet, shockingly, when compared to Beck and Śmigły-Rydz, the operatic Italian dictator emerges as a quite reasonable statesman.

The memoirs of Clara Petacci, Mussolini's long-time mistress, were recently published in Italy. Piotr Kowalczuk, Rome correspondent for the magazine Uważam Rze Historia, wrote extensively about them. Petacci meticulously recorded her conversations with the Italian leader on the eve of World War II and immediately after its outbreak. "Poor Poland! What an exalted nation. How could the Poles delude themselves that England and France would help them?!" the Duce confided to his partner.

On May 4, when it became clear that our leaders were pushing the country toward disaster, Mussolini said:

"Not good! Not good! Poland is puffing itself up, and I don't know what it hopes to achieve by doing so! One-third of the population is non-Polish. They shouldn't even think about resisting the Germans. By the time

help arrives, Poland will already be occupied. For a small country to stand up to Germany is madness, madness."

On August 8, the Duce made some very strong statements about Poland, which, unfortunately, were not without merit: "The Poles listen to some morons and say ridiculous things. For example, that some German cities, such as Berlin, are Polish, that they will occupy Berlin. It's like me saying that France is Italian because Caesar occupied it. It's absurd and provocative! The situation is very serious and threatens to have terrible consequences. Poles are said to be exalted fanatics. They are putting the whole world in danger.".

Another conversation with Petacci on this subject took place on August 30. The Duce was pale and nervous, raising his voice. "Poor Poles. They will be lost because of their exaltation. And they don't realize it. How can they count on help from England and France?!" These gentlemen haven't looked at the map. Just like the English and the French. How are they supposed to come to their aid? Through the Siegfried Line? The Poles will be victims of English false pride and French cowardice. Tomorrow there will be war. The mistake lies with Poland."

On September 13, when Poland was already crumbling under German blows, Mussolini spoke with sadness and sympathy about the "poor Poles." "Poles suffer from a suicidal mania," he emphasized. "Many times in history, they have expressed the need to break their necks. They are completely broken. Poor victims of illusion. Three million exalted soldiers, but unprepared, without proper weapons and command."

Four days later, when the Soviet Union attacked Poland from behind, Clara Petacci wrote in her diary: "He doesn't smile at me, he is gloomy. And he says: 'Poor Poland is finished! The Russians are doing their job. Poor Poles. This is a criminal massacre and another disgrace for England. How sad... Who would have thought a few months ago that Beck would have to seek refuge in Romania. But they wanted it themselves. They couldn't fight effectively against a power like Germany. Enthusiasm is not enough against powerful weapons. Think about it! Those poor people rode horses against tanks. I feel sorry for this nation."

Our leaders from 1939 give the impression of Japanese kamikaze pilots who crashed their planes into American aircraft carriers and battleships. Few of them actually reached their targets, as most were shot down at a safe distance. The title of the greatest kamikaze of the Second Polish Republic obviously belongs to Józef Beck. Please do not misunderstand me: I have nothing against these heroic pilots, and by comparing them to Beck, I did not mean to offend the brave Japanese nation. If a young man wants to sacrifice his life in battle for his homeland, this attitude deserves not only the highest recognition, but also the highest military decoration.

However, if such a kamikaze were a commercial airline captain and carried out a suicide attack with a civilian Boeing filled with passengers entrusted to his care, he should be considered a criminal. So who was Beck, who was not at the controls of an airplane with 300 or 400 people on board, but of a country with a population of 35 million? And who crashed that country with great force into the hardest rock in Europe at the time?

"After seventy years, in the name of historical truth, as well as some patriotic and human integrity, especially towards those who suffered cruelly and died, it must be made clear: Polish leaders, probably not fully aware of what they were doing, in the name of honor and national independence, exposed the entire country and its 35 million inhabitants to the terrible fate of mass extermination and cruel suffering, which, it seems, could have been avoided or at least significantly reduced," wrote Andrzej Wielowieyski. It is not easy to consider Rydz-Śmigły's decision morally justified. As a soldier, one can and must risk one's own life, and even risk the fate of one's army to a certain extent, because that is what it is called upon to do. However, one should not risk, or even sacrifice, the lives and very existence of an entire nation, even for very beautiful and important principles.

Therefore, Poles should have, based on common sense, reached an agreement with the Germans, because that was the only thing that could save the physical existence of the nation.

Let us give the floor once again to Stanisław Mackiewicz. "Our military leadership: Marshal Śmigły-Rydz and his worthy entourage limited all war preparations to what we might call the application of the yoga system. Once, from a market stall in a small town, among dream books and other literature of this kind, I chose a book entitled *The Secrets of Yoga*. From it, I learned that according to the teachings of yoga, it is enough to repeat aloud: 'I am not hungry, I am not hungry' in order to wean oneself off food altogether. Before the war in 1939, our military also based all its preparations on autosuggestion. It did not allow anyone to doubt and, worst of all, it did not doubt itself that we were strong, united, and ready. Any fears, doubts, or even well-meaning advice regarding war preparations were considered... an insult to the army's honor. I believe that a soldier who bases his war preparations on naive boasting should be, at most, a trumpeter in the army, not an officer behind a desk at the general staff.

This brings us to another important question: why was it necessary to deceive the nation so shamefully? Take a look at any Polish memoirs from 1939. The rapid defeat of the Polish army and the total chaos that accompanied the collapse of the Republic came as a terrible shock to its citizens. The fact that they were told that Poland was a great power could still be forgiven to Beck and his associates. But the fact that they were told that Hitler was a paper tiger cannot be forgiven.

All those stories about German cardboard tanks, about Berlin, which the Polish cavalry was supposed to capture after ten days of war, about the march on East Prussia... In the microfilm reading room of the National Library in Warsaw, you can browse through Polish newspapers from those last pre-war months. It makes for truly depressing reading. What wasn't written there about German weakness and Polish power? One big pile of nonsense and rubbish.

And then there is that silly song, which, in light of the tragic events that were about to unfold, sounds like some kind of perverse mockery:

No one will do anything to
us, no one will take
anything from us, because
we are led by Śmigły,
Marshal Śmigły-Rydz.

Indeed, Śmigły-Rydz led us well...

The biggest mistake is underestimating your opponent. What the Polish government did was a mistake squared. When you add to this all the stories spun under the boastful slogan "Strong, united, and ready!" and the promise of our pathetic marshal that we would not give the Germans "a single button," you get the impression that Poles were living in some kind of hurrah-patriotic frenzy, in some other reality. A fourth dimension. Today, it is difficult to understand why a nation that had struggled so hard to regain its independence after 120 years was so enthusiastic about losing it.

"The mentality of Polish society on the eve of the 1939 war could be the subject of interesting sociological and psychological studies," wrote Stanisław Swianiewicz. But is this surprising, given that Minister Beck himself, although he must have realized that he was talking nonsense, argued that Germany was "parading across Europe today with nine divisions"?

Meanwhile, the Polish Association of Western Territories called for a boycott of German goods. The government's propaganda activities led the more ardent "patriots" to engage in anti-German pogroms in the streets. Such incidents took place, among others, on May 13 and 14 in Tomaszów Mazowiecki and on May 17-21 in Konstantynów near Łódź. Interestingly, in a

in a fighting frenzy, also attacked the Swiss, which prompted a protest from that country's ambassador.

Piotr Skwieciński recently published in Uważam Rze an account by a representative of a group of white Russians who were active near Grodno before the war. Written by an outsider who observed the events with amazement, it excellently captures the atmosphere that prevailed in the last weeks before the outbreak of World War II. Unfortunately, this was done with the consent or even encouragement of the authorities.

"We began to feel uncomfortable," wrote the Russian. "Twenty years of living in Poland gave us a close acquaintance with the Polish state. Despite our deep gratitude to the Polish authorities who gave us shelter, we could not escape the thought that Poland's existence was unstable... Living here in the wilderness behind the magnificent decorations of powerful Poland, we were aware of the complete uncertainty and chaos of its state structure... In the East, there was an enemy lying in wait, ready to act at literally any moment. Poland's main strength and security, in our firm opinion, lay in its treaty with Germany, and until the very last days, we were certain that Beck and Field Marshal Göring, a frequent visitor to Poland, had long had a secret alliance. In the last month before the outbreak of war, we watched our friends, the Poles, with great astonishment... In those days, we ceased to understand each other.

This is what white Russians heard from their Polish friends: that the National Socialist regime in Germany was collapsing, that thousands of Wehrmacht deserters were crossing the Polish border (including officers!), that one strike by the Polish Army would be enough to bring it all crashing down. Königsberg and Berlin would be "ours" in two weeks, and the whole war would last three weeks at most. Even if our allies did not help us, we would deal with the Krauts ourselves. After all, as state propaganda argued, we were a superpower.

"Opposing all this," wrote the Russian, "was completely ineffective. If we wanted to express skepticism, they would start looking at us askance... Having no doubt that the Polish army would suffer a terrible defeat, we wondered whether the Bolsheviks would take advantage of the local population's undisputed hostility towards the Polish authorities and whether they would launch a communist uprising. But “we” were just a few Russian officers and intellectuals. The Poles, counting on a two-week victorious march on Berlin, did not think about these matters at all.

No, it was not just the mood of hysterical crowds, but also that of the elites and, worse still, Polish diplomats. Jay P. Moffat, head of the European Division at the US State Department, described in his notes a conversation he had with Jerzy Potocki, the Polish ambassador to Washington, in 1939. "The Polish ambassador called," he wrote. "He had nothing new to say, only reiterating his government's belief that Germany's strength was being overestimated. He stated that the German army was not the army of 1914. The officers were poorly trained... The best generals have been eliminated, and the rest are just party hacks. German society does not want to fight, and starting a war at a time when conditions are so difficult that food is being rationed would be suicidal. This whole conversation revealed such an exaggeratedly optimistic point of view and such an exceptionally senseless underestimation of the enemy that if these attitudes are typical of Polish thinking in general, I am beginning to have very bad feelings. It is worth adding that Potocki was a captain in the Polish Army...

Meanwhile, in Poland, the more enthusiastic and excited patriots demanded the immediate annexation of East Prussia and Opole Silesia to Poland. On May 11, 1939, an article by a certain Zofia Żelska-Mrozowicka appeared in the Dziennik Bydgoski newspaper, in which she directly called for the murder of Germans living in Poland. In the end, Jan Szembek had to intervene with the local authorities, demanding that such excesses be curtailed.

He opposed the distribution of crude caricatures of Hitler and maps showing Poland's border running under Berlin. The authorities even began to take sluggish action: a resident of Greater Poland who named his dog "Hitler" was sentenced to three months in prison for "insulting the head of a neighboring country." However, the sentence was suspended.

Let us listen to how arrogantly Beck spoke on June 20 about other European players: "I do not get the impression that a European conflict is inevitable. Hitler has embarked on a very unwise policy, from which it is now very difficult for him to extricate himself. The blame for Hitler's policy lies with Chamberlain and his Munich action, France for its position on the Czech question, and the stupidity of Mr. Ribbentrop."

These statements are truly bizarre. However, they accurately reflect Beck's mentality. Everyone in Europe is an idiot. Only he is a genius. The truth would be revealed in two months and ten days.

Perhaps the most accurate description of our minister was provided by the former head of Romanian diplomacy, Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, in his memoirs. "Colonel Beck: what a strange personality!" he wrote. – Ambitious and vindictive to such an extent that he is willing to jeopardize not only his own career, but even the fate of his country. Some of those who knew him saw him as a great opportunist. I do not share this opinion, because an opportunist always acts at the right time. And so Beck's politics were never opportunistic in this sense. Beck usually acts contrary to logic and contrary to the obvious interests of his country, assuming that he can arrange people and matters according to his wishes, which too often remain mere whims and nothing more."

Chapter 27

The Ribbentrop–Beck Pact

On May 23, Adolf Hitler gathered the most important German generals at the Reich Chancellery to present his plans to them. He said that it was no longer possible to pursue politics without bloodshed. Since Poland had decided to form an alliance with Great Britain and France, it must be eliminated first as the weakest link in this arrangement. Those gathered were very surprised by the Führer's harsh anti-Polish rhetoric, as he had been considered an incorrigible Polonophile until recently.

Among other things, he said that "Poland will always side with our enemies." Guided by his instincts and impulses, Hitler radically changed his attitude towards the Republic of Poland in the spring of 1939. Enraged that the "rebellious Polacks" – as Goebbels wrote – had thwarted his plans, he came to hate us. This had a profound impact on the Polish nation during the occupation of 1939–1945, when the Germans subjected us to an exceptionally brutal, genocidal policy. The French ambassador to Berlin, André François-Poncet, was right when he wrote that Poland's rejection of the alliance proposal "provoked a violent outburst of anger in Hitler and was not without influence on the subsequent merciless and barbaric treatment of that unfortunate country."

“[Previously] Hitler not only relied on Poland’s neutrality, but was simply friendly and peacefully disposed towards Poland, reserving it for some future expedition to Russia, which he undoubtedly dreamed of,” wrote Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz. "Now he speaks of Poland with the same hatred as he does of England. Perhaps even worse, because for several years he had certain political hopes for Poland, which have now been dashed. He feels disappointed, deceived, almost betrayed."

So, war it was. Hitler never went to war without securing his rear. He had no doubt that France would be afraid to take military action against him and would abandon its ally when he attacked Poland. However, the question arose as to what would happen next. Once Poland lay in ruins, he would have to move on France, and who would then secure Hitler's rear in the East...?

On April 7, 1939, the leadership of the Reich Foreign Ministry instructed one of its diplomats to conduct a preliminary, discreet survey on the possibility of a German-Soviet agreement. This was the day after Józef Beck signed the British guarantees...

Let us pause here for a moment to take another look at the Soviet Union's policy at the time. The sole and overriding goal of that state was world revolution and the imposition of the communist system on the entire human race by force. Of course, this was to happen in stages, with Europe being the first target.

Even Stalin realized that the hopeless Red Army, with its rifles on strings and cardboard shoes, would stop at the Urals after invading Europe. In order to carry out his plan, he had to wreak such havoc and weaken the continent to such an extent that even his ragtag army would be able to conquer it. This, however, could only be achieved after the outbreak of an "imperialist war between capitalist states."

In other words, Stalin did everything he could to antagonize the British, French, Germans, Poles, and Italians. The French and British were the first to approach him with a request for an alliance in early 1939. However, Stalin gave evasive answers, made excuses, and waited. He waited

, of course, for Beck's decision, which was to determine the fate of the Soviet Union and international communism.

When it became clear that the German-Polish alliance would not happen, he not only breathed a sigh of relief like a man who had escaped the guillotine, but also began sending signals to Berlin that he would gladly replace Poland as the Reich's eastern ally. Why did he decide to support Hitler in the early stages of the war, rather than Chamberlain and Daladier? As a communist, from an ideological point of view, it should have made no difference to him.

The answer is simple. When you want to provoke a conflict, you always support the aggressive side, you always support the country that is seeking it. The country that will attack, not the one that will defend itself. It was the alliance with Stalin that was the final impetus that pushed Hitler into war and, in fact, became the spark that ignited the global conflict. Viktor Suvorov described this in detail in *Icebreaker* (the title icebreaker was supposed to be Hitler paving the way for Stalin through Europe), and there is no point in repeating it. I refer you to this book.

Meanwhile, in July, mutual advances and soundings turned into concrete talks. Already during meetings between mid-level diplomats, open discussions began about the possibility of a joint partition of Poland and the Baltic states. Earlier, on May 3, in an ostentatious gesture, Stalin dismissed Maxim Litvinov, a Jew and well-known opponent of Germany, from his position as foreign minister. He was replaced by Vyacheslav Molotov. The whole world saw this as a grim warning and a harbinger of a possible German-Soviet alliance.

The whole world except—yes, you guessed it—Józef Beck, who was very pleased with this change. Litwinowa, a Polish Jew born in Białystok, Beck could not stand. He accused him of Lithuanianism and anti-Polish prejudice. Our ambassador in Moscow, Wacław Grzybowski, shared this opinion.

The rest is already widely known in Poland. On the night of August 19-20, a German-Soviet trade agreement was signed in Moscow, and Molotov handed German diplomats a draft of the political pact proposed by Moscow. On the afternoon of August 20, Adolf Hitler wrote a letter addressed to "Mr. Stalin, Moscow." His response to the Soviet offer was positive.

On August 23, Joachim von Ribbentrop landed in Moscow. That night, in the Kremlin, in the presence of Stalin, a pact was signed between the Soviet Union and the Third Reich, including a secret protocol concerning the division of Poland and several other countries in Central and Eastern Europe between the two totalitarian powers. Twenty-one years after its creation, the fate of the Second Polish Republic was sealed. Champagne corks popped in the Kremlin, while in Berlin, Hitler was too excited to sleep.

The consequences of the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact were apocalyptic for the Republic of Poland, and we are still feeling the effects today. It was the most ominous and disastrous document in the entire history of Poland. However, it must be said openly: this pact did not have to be signed. Our country did not have to fall. Joachim von Ribbentrop did not have to fly to Moscow.

All this was a consequence of Minister Józef Beck's decision. Hitler reached an agreement with the Soviets solely because Beck rejected the Germans' proposal for an alliance. Had he decided otherwise, instead of the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact, the Ribbentrop–Beck Pact would have been signed in Warsaw, and the history of Europe would have taken a completely different course.

Hitler himself spoke about this at a meeting with army and SS commanders, which took place the day before the pact was signed, on August 22, 1939. "The Führer confessed to those gathered that just a few months earlier he had wanted to take action against the Western powers first," wrote Stanisław Żerko. "However, it was not possible to bring Warsaw into the pro-German camp. It became clear that during the war in the West, Poland would threaten the German rear. It is clear

The point was that the pact with Stalin served not only to defeat Poland, but was also to be used for a later attack on French and British forces.

Yes, we could have sat at that table. We could have fought in that war outside our country's borders and conquered new territories. We could have finally, instead of suffering "moral victories" – which, alongside cavalry, are Poland's greatest military specialty – finally achieve a real victory. We could have fought not with petrol bombs thrown from behind barricades and homemade guns, but with tanks, planes, and cannons. We could have fought using the army, not children.

We could have finally protected Polish citizens – Jews, Poles, but also Ukrainians and Belarusians – from terrible persecution, gas chambers, and the hell of the labor camps. We could have saved Warsaw from destruction and our elites from Katyn and Palmyra. All that was needed was for Józef Beck's signature to appear on the document signed on August 23 instead of Vyacheslav Molotov's. There was such a possibility.

The map attached to the secret protocol of the pact would not show the territory of the Republic of Poland, but the territory of the Soviet Union. And the signing ceremony would not have taken place in the Kremlin, but in the Royal Castle in Warsaw. The castle, which had already burned down in early September 1939 after German bombing and whose reconstruction was finally completed only a few years ago. However, our national honor and its defender, Józef Beck, did not allow us to do all this. We paid too much for it.

In order to accomplish his first major task, the destruction of France, Hitler had to find an ally in the east who would secure his rear. He had only two countries to choose from: Poland and the Soviet Union. He preferred Poland as his ally, but when Beck rejected his advances, he turned to Moscow with an offer of an alliance. It was we who pushed Hitler into Stalin's arms.

Thus, the scenario that had caused the greatest terror in Poland throughout the entire period of independence came true. The grim R+N scenario. Ironically, Józef Piłsudski made preventing such a scenario from happening the primary goal of Polish foreign policy. Before his death, he instructed his generals and Foreign Minister Józef Beck accordingly.

"During the reign of Catherine and Frederick of Prussia," said the Marshal, "Poland experienced firsthand what it means when its two most powerful neighbors come to an agreement. Poland was torn to shreds. This danger always exists for Poland." He repeated to his generals: "We cannot wage war on two fronts. So I will not teach you to wage war on two fronts. War on two fronts means dying here on Saski Square with sabers in your hands in defense of national honor."

How many times must Józef Beck have heard similar warnings from his "master"! Meanwhile, it was he who, with his unreasonable, disastrous policy, led to the realization of such a scenario. The Marshal, looking down on what his "student" was doing, must have been distraught.

How sensible our ambassador in Oslo, Władysław Neuman, was. Already in the mid-1930s, he warned that “Hitler will attack Poland unless we decide to make *common cause* with him against the Soviets; Hitler may one day come to an agreement with Russia and, together with it, carry out a new partition of Poland.” However, as historian Marek Kornat writes, "the opinions of this diplomat were treated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw as unrealistic and overly pessimistic..."

The warnings of our military attaché in Berlin, Colonel Antoni Szymański, were also ignored. This exceptionally sensible and prudent officer was well aware of the enormous disparity in strength between Poland and Germany and tried to make his superiors in Warsaw realize this. To no avail.

On May 2, after the Polish-German breakup, he was unexpectedly invited to the birthday party of Hans Lammers, Hitler's chief of staff. At one point, General Bodenschatz, who was also at the party, asked his Polish colleague to talk in private. "I am returning

I am asking you to listen to my message very carefully, he said. Sir, if Hitler comes to believe that Germany could be surrounded by Poland from the east, he will not hesitate to ally himself with the devil himself! And I don't think there is any doubt among us who "der Teufel" is.

That same night, Colonel Szymański sent an encrypted telegram to Warsaw informing them of this warning. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs treated it as... part of a game designed to persuade Poland to make concessions. The telegram ended up in the trash.

"We were a country squeezed between two powers. We stood between two insatiable imperialisms," wrote Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski about the situation in Poland on the eve of the outbreak of war. "So we observed, perhaps even excessively, our neutrality and our separateness from both German National Socialism and Russian communism. We believed that joining one of these blocs would hasten the bloody war we wanted to avoid."

This reasoning was fatally flawed. It was precisely Poland's failure to join "one of these blocs" that accelerated the bloody war, and what is worse, this war broke out precisely because Poland was torn to pieces by the allied "insatiable imperialisms." So the opposite of what our "statesmen" had predicted came to pass.

Believing in exotic allies from across the sea who would arrive at the last minute like a fairy-tale prince to save us was madness. German historian Golo Mann, quoted by Marek Kornat, was right. He wrote that observations from the last three centuries lead to the conclusion that there are still three recurring scenarios in the geopolitics of Central and Eastern Europe: Poland and Russia against Germany, Germany and Poland against Russia, or Germany and Russia against Poland.

It is obvious that in 1939 Poland could not side with the Soviets. This left two scenarios to choose from. With Germany against the Soviets, or with the Soviets and Germany against Poland. Beck's reckless policy led to the latter scenario becoming a reality. And this was, is, and will forever remain the most dangerous international arrangement for Poland. We are all too familiar with the tragic consequences of its implementation in 1939.

"We are trying to keep Russia, whether white or red, away from Europe," Beck once explained his eastern policy to his trusted colleagues. In reality, however, it was his short-sighted policy that allowed the Soviet Union into Europe.

I repeat: Hitler was a beast in human skin. A terrible criminal. An alliance with him would have been a dirty alliance – just as dirty as our alliance with the Soviets in 1941–1943. However, like that alliance, it would not have been an “alliance of our dreams,” but a necessity. A necessity in this case aimed at saving the country from the catastrophe that was the consequences of the German-Soviet agreement. Saving the independence and biological substance of the nation. Such an alliance would be the result of a reasonable assessment of our chances and the potential of our opponent. It would be an unpleasant but sensible decision.

You are surely familiar with the saying, "*If you* can*'t* beat *them, join them*." It is no coincidence that this is a British saying. Because even though "perfidious Albion" is one of the main villains in this book, Poles should always look to Great Britain as a role model.

As one of the characters in Józef Mackiewicz's *Nie trzeba głośno mówić* (No Need to Speak Loudly) said, there is no such thing as dirty politics. There is only wise or foolish politics. Britain's policy was dirty, but wise. Poland's policy, on the other hand, was foolish. Great Britain won World War II (although its long-term effects were negative for the empire), while Poland lost World War II miserably.

The eminent historian Józef Feldman was right when he wrote in his essay *On Realism in Political Thinking*, he wrote that "one of the cardinal shortcomings [of Polish political thinking] is the assessment of

political situations not on the basis of an analysis of the reality that surrounds us, but under the imperative pressure of feelings and desires. We see not what is, but what we want to see."

During World War II, the British taught us a brutal lesson on how foreign policy should be conducted. It would be bad for Poland if we did not remember this.

Let us return to Józef Beck. When, as a result of his reckless decision, Hitler began to come to terms with Stalin, our minister dismissed it with a shrug. Yes, although it is hard to believe today, the possibility of the worst-case scenario for Poland – an alliance between Berlin and Moscow – did not make much of an impression on the last foreign minister of the Republic of Poland. He believed that the information reaching Warsaw about German-Soviet talks was an attempt to intimidate Poland, and that no cooperation between Stalin and Hitler was possible due to ideological differences.

Here are some of his characteristic statements from those months:

1. "Hitler is not Bismarck; he is too violent to be capable of the subtle game played by his great predecessor. I am counting on this very much. Some German generals seem to disagree, but they will never oppose him. I see no possibility of a German-Soviet agreement. These two systems, these two modern religions, are so similar that they are mutually exclusive."
2. "I don't think we have anything to fear from our eastern neighbor for many years to come. It is far too weak to initiate military action on its own initiative. No country can withstand executing its military and political personnel every few years. We have a non-aggression pact with Russia, and that is enough for us."
3. "We would be satisfied if our allies reached an agreement with the Soviets that would allow us, in the event of war with Germany, to use the transit of war material from the allies through the Soviets to us, as well as the supply of Soviet raw materials and materials needed to wage war."

Yes, it's hard to believe, but these three statements were made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland . A man, in whose hands were the reins of our country in the turbulent months preceding the outbreak of World War II. These three quotes alone are enough to replace volumes of tedious analyses in which we would try to prove that he was an incompetent man. The last quote proves that Beck not only did not expect the Soviet-German talks to end in an alliance, not only did he fail to understand that he had pushed Hitler into Stalin's arms, but he also hoped that Stalin would help him.

Could it be that Beck really didn't bother to read *Adolf Bocheński's Between Germany and Russia* by Adolf Bocheński?

“Our public opinion cannot delude itself,” wrote Bocheński in 1937, “that [German-Soviet antagonism] will last forever. Particularly harmful in this regard are the illusions that the ideological differences between Hitlerism and communism will prevent an agreement between these two countries. The old master of foreign policy history, the great Albert Sorel, would turn in his grave if he heard these arguments. After all, he devoted 35 years of his life to publishing eight thick volumes of his *Europe and the French Revolution*, in which he proved beyond any doubt how insignificant ideological issues were during that period and how much they were dominated by the raison d'état. Admittedly, today the agreement between Hitlerism and communism seems impossible to us, but we should not forget that 127 years ago, the murderer of the Duke of Enghien married the daughter of the Apostolic Emperor. The raison d'état sometimes allows for fundamental ideological compromises.

Yes – what our minister failed to grasp was perfectly understood by a conservative journalist who was much younger than him. All the signals reaching Warsaw, and there were many of them, regarding the possibility of a Soviet-German agreement were downplayed. They were dismissed as attempts at disinformation. Our diplomats continued to regard them as an attempt by Hitler to blackmail Poland because, as they assured each other, “the Soviets will not move.” They considered these signals to be “psychological pressure.” Beck was so skeptical about this possibility that when he was awakened on the night of August 23 by a phone call from the duty secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who informed him that Ribbentrop was flying to Moscow, the head of Polish diplomacy snapped angrily: "I don't want any such jokes."

The next day, he stated that the pact would not have much significance. Not only that, he was downright triumphant! Speaking with the ambassadors of France and Great Britain, he said with satisfaction that he had "never believed in the sincere intention of the Soviets to fully engage in the emerging conflict with Germany." Well, well, so it was he – Beck – who was right when he said that Stalin was no partner for Paris and London in the war against Hitler. What a triumph. He was proven right.

But it did not even occur to him that this alliance posed a mortal danger to Poland. Just one day before the pact was signed in Moscow, Ambassador Raczyński sent Beck a telegram from London informing him that he knew from a reliable source that the Soviets and Germans were dividing Eastern Europe into spheres of influence in diplomatic offices. Beck considered this to be another German bluff. The government newspaper Gazeta Polska published an article entitled *A new piece of paper signed in Moscow*.

"Stanisław Mackiewicz sat in his editorial office deeply moved. News had just arrived about the conclusion of the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact," recalled Stanisław Swianiewicz. "He didn't need to explain to me what it meant. We both realized that the drama of our fate had already begun. After a moment, when we had analyzed the situation together, Mackiewicz decided to call the press department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw and ask what their reaction to the news was. The answer was: ‘The Ministry of Foreign Affairs believes that Poland’s security in the east has not been diminished by this pact, because we have a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, concluded in 1932 and recently confirmed in 1938.

Stanisław Mackiewicz wrote: “But how could Beck, as a Pole in a ministerial position, fail to see the Russian danger? After all, as an officer and a supposedly intelligent man, he must have realized that a war between Poland and Germany would result in the occupation of the entire Polish territory in a short time, and Stalin could not agree to this because it would bring him too close to the German border. Stalin therefore had two options: 1. either to defend Poland against Germany, for which he was too weak, as the Soviet army could not compete with the German army, 2. or to participate with Germany in our partition. Of course, he chose the second option, which settled the Polish question for him and at the same time ignited the fire in Europe that he had been striving for."

Here are three conclusions Beck reached when he learned of the signing of the Hitler–Stalin pact:

"I. It does not change Poland's actual position in any way, given that Poland never counted on Soviet assistance.

II. It does not change Poland's policy in any way, nor does it affect its relations with its allies.

III. It is proof of the double game played by the Soviets, who are certainly avoiding full involvement on the side of any group of bourgeois states, while eagerly seeing the possibilities of a European war.

The aforementioned Foreign Ministry official Stanisław Zabiełło recalled that "we did not treat the newly concluded Soviet-German pact as a direct threat to our rear, but as an attempt by the Soviet Union to avoid being drawn into the impending European war." Sam

On August 28, Beck told Szembek that there was nothing to fear and that he considered the overall situation to be not too bad.

"The extensive military preparations that we are continuing put us in a good position militarily today," the minister argued. "France has made a huge military effort and now has an army of two million troops assembled on the Maginot Line. Of course, if war breaks out, it will not be possible to stop halfway. The Soviets seem quite flustered after signing a non-aggression pact with Germany."

After the war, Kazimierz Okulicz recounted the following story: “In the first decade [meaning the first ten days] after the outbreak of the [Polish-German] war, a prominent Polish diplomat, a man holding one of the most important positions in Europe, was passing through a certain city in Poland. A Polish staff officer, gifted with great political insight, having information about very suspicious movements of Soviet troops on the Polish border and being convinced that they were directed against Poland, reported this to the diplomat. The Polish diplomat's reaction was characteristic.

– But no, it can't be anything serious. I know that just a few days ago, the Soviet ambassador, Mr. Sharonov, assured Minister Beck that Russia's attitude toward the Polish-German conflict is based on existing agreements with Poland and that it does not intend to deviate from its position of proper neutrality.

Truly, one of the greatest mysteries, one of the most difficult puzzles to explain in our frenzied pre-September diplomacy, is the complete disregard for the Soviet threat. And this by people who considered themselves disciples of Józef Piłsudski, who always repeated that Moscow posed the greatest threat to Poland's existence. It is truly difficult to explain this rationally.

Professor Paweł Wieczorkiewicz provided some clues to solving this mystery in his *Political History of Poland 1935–1945*. He asked whether the dire state of knowledge about the Soviets and the disregard for the threat they posed was perhaps influenced by the deep infiltration of the Eastern Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by Soviet agents. According to the professor, the head of this department and one of Beck's most trusted associates, Lieutenant Colonel Tadeusz Kobylański, worked for the NKVD.

He was recruited by the famous Soviet intelligence officer Artur Artuzov, who himself fell victim to the Great Purge in 1937. "Kobylański served in Moscow between 1925 and 1928. There, he attracted attention as a card player, a lover of revelry, and a speculator," wrote Professor Wieczorkiewicz. "However, the betrayal was not only financial, but also homosexual. Kobylański, as a well-paid agent, provided, at least until 1937, complete information on all matters of interest to the Soviets. As he was an officer of the Second Department of the General Staff, and then deputy director of the Political-Economic Department and head of the Eastern Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, related and close friends with the family of President Mościcki, the actions of the two and Beck's policy had no secrets from Moscow from then on."

Beck's deputy, Mirosław Arciszewski, is also said to have been in Moscow's pay. We will not know what influence these people had on the minister, or whether there were any other Stalinist agents in his circle, until Moscow opens its secret post-Soviet archives. For now, we must abandon this thread, at most adding the Marshal's comment: "In times of crisis, beware of agents."

Chapter 28

Finis Poloniae

It was the end. On August 23, 1939, all European players – except, of course, Józef Beck and Edward Śmigły-Rydz – had no doubt that the short history of the Second Polish Republic had come to an end. It became clear that in the coming days, Germany, with the cooperation of the Soviets, would crush Poland into dust. The Soviet Union, as Śmigły-Rydz astutely observed at the time, threatened not only the Polish state, but also the Polish soul.

What should have been done after the signing of the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact? Did we still have any room for maneuver at that last moment? Of course, there was no chance of avoiding defeat, but there was still one option left. So foreign to Polish tradition and temperament – we simply had to capitulate. Go, as Emil Hácha had done six months earlier, to Berlin and simply surrender. Give up the Corridor, Silesia, and whatever else the Germans demanded. Anything, as long as there was no war! Anything, as long as there was no loss of independence, and anything, as long as the Bolsheviks did not invade the eastern territories of the Republic of Poland.

After the signing of the Hitler–Stalin Pact, Poland's fate was sealed and it was necessary to save what could be saved. You might say that Beck simply could not do that. Perhaps he would have saved several million people, but he would have lost his honor and been forever cursed by history. And no one wants to be remembered that way by future generations. The question is, three weeks later, when he crossed the Romanian-Polish border, leaving dying Poland behind, did this man disgrace himself? Did he preserve the honor he was so sensitive about? I dare say he did not.

Poland was dying as a result of his policies. As an officer, Beck knew very well what he should have done in such a situation. He should have exchanged his ridiculous top hat for a military cap, turned back from the Zaleszczyki road, and fought on the outskirts of Warsaw. He had another choice, which an officer and a man of honor faces in such a situation... Perhaps if he had chosen one of these paths, he would have earned the respect of future generations.

However, he did not want to share the fate of his nation—a fate that he himself had brought upon it. He was too proud and arrogant for that. He believed that the Romanians would let him go to the West, and that he would rule his now defunct country from the safety of Paris or London...

In his aforementioned text *Nad trumną Becka ciszej, proszę!* (Quiet, please, over Beck's coffin!), Rafał Ziemkiewicz wrote: "Any leader with even a modicum of responsibility, having familiarized himself with the realities of the time, would have had to say: we don't stand a chance, we have to surrender. Incidentally, did Beck's apologists read Churchill's memoirs? The unyielding Churchill, who was ready to fight on the beaches, in the streets, and in the courtyards, who promised sweat, blood, and tears, says there explicitly: if Hitler had obtained atomic weapons and aimed them at London, we would have had no choice but to surrender unconditionally. Beck would not have surrendered in his place. Beck would simply have brought about destruction in the name of honor, having fled to some safe place himself in advance, of course, in order to continue the fight from there.

Grzegorz Górski wrote: "Let us note that no one in Europe or beyond, either sooner or later, made such a decision as easily as Beck. Everyone tried to ensure that the war would either bypass them or come as late as possible. Everyone wanted to gain time to prepare for it as best they could.

and start at the most convenient moment. Everyone tried to do this with a view to minimizing losses for their countries. Beck, however, was an exception in this regard.

He saw no major problem in challenging what was then the world's greatest military power. A power that genuinely struck fear into the combined forces of the British and French superpowers of the time. Meanwhile, it did not occur to Beck that Poland could use some time to, for example, base its army's communications on more modern methods rather than carrier pigeons.

Beck was well aware of Germany's power, and our Second Department had identified around seventy percent of German forces. Despite this, he took on not only the world's greatest military power, but also a country with a totalitarian system of government. Did he really not ask himself what German occupation of Poland would look like?

Did he really believe that the liberal German occupation system of 1915–1918 would be repeated? Did Hitler's actions against the opposition and Jews in his own country not prompt him to reflect on the fate of the nation he was leaving at the mercy of the Germans? Unfortunately, in all his statements from the last, decisive weeks before the war – when even he must have predicted that Poland would be occupied – there is not a trace of such reflection. Another mistake Beck made was that he did not understand the criminal nature of National Socialism; he did not realize who he was actually messing with.

Polish leaders were well aware of the functioning of dictatorial regimes in both neighboring countries. They knew about *Mein Kampf*, the Night of the Long Knives, the pogroms against Jews, and concentration camps. Hermann Rauschning's book *The Revolution of Nihilism*, which exposed Hitlerism, was well known," wrote Andrzej Wielowieyski. "They also knew what Stalinist collectivization was, how cruelly purges were carried out in the Bolshevik Party and the Red Army, and how the gulags functioned. Polish leaders could not claim that they did not know what awaited us. They should have made a conscious choice, because they were guilty of failing to realistically predict what the Bolsheviks and the Nazis might do to us. However, I think they preferred not to tell themselves that the real dilemma was a choice between humiliation and vassalization of the state on the one hand, and defending honor and the inevitable death of millions of people on the other.

The author of *At the Crossroads of History* added: “[Polish leaders] also justified themselves by saying that an agreement with Germany would have been rational if it had been imperial Germany, i.e., a relatively normal European country. However, succumbing to Hitler’s insane, brutal dictatorship went beyond political calculation.” But it should be the other way around! If Germany in 1939 had indeed been a “rational, normal European country,” then fine – it would have been possible to surrender to occupation for even half a century. It would have been mild, and the scale of repression against Poles would probably have been negligible. However, faced with a brutal, bloodthirsty dictatorship, it was necessary to prevent occupation at all costs. It is precisely with such a "partner" that particular caution should be exercised.

And really, all of this was predictable. “I have always been in favor of seeking agreement with Germany, regardless of the political system in place there,” wrote Stanisław Swianiewicz. “It was also always clear to me that if war broke out with Nazi Germany, it would be a very ruthless war. During my pre-war trips to Germany, I formed the opinion that Nazi policy fluctuated between two extreme concepts regarding Poland: alliance or extermination.”

But what are we talking about? Shortly before the outbreak of war, Anthony Eden, making no secret of his surprise, emphasized that Beck and his associates were people who had decided unanimously
"rather expose half the country to destruction than submit to German rule." In the end, they did not expose half the country, but the whole country.

The ending of this story is bitter and well known. On August 25, Great Britain signed a mutual assistance treaty with Poland – just in case Poland changed its mind and reached an agreement with Hitler at the last minute – which delayed the outbreak of World War II by five days. Originally, *Fall Weiss* was to be put into effect on August 26, but Hitler hesitated and postponed the start of the war.

This agreement with Great Britain was a global curiosity. Probably no other country has ever signed such a disastrous alliance agreement as Poland did on August 25, 1939. Textbooks and mainstream patriotic literature claim that this agreement was "Poland's response to the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact, securing Polish interests and Polish independence more strongly" (authentic quote).

I must admit that when I read such theories – written by our leading professors – I feel at least embarrassed. As far as I remember, the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact was an agreement that decided on the partition of Poland between the Soviet Union and the Third Reich. It is enough to read the Polish-British agreement of August 25 to see that Great Britain guaranteed us independence and our borders, but... only in the event of aggression from Germany.

The United Kingdom did not want to make any commitments regarding Soviet aggression, our eastern territories, or our eastern border. Why? Because, of course, it was already counting on the Soviets to side with it in the next stage of the war. And for their participation in the war against Germany, they would have to be paid with Poland. The pact with England was therefore no response to the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, because London did not even want to hear about any commitments that could stop the Soviet annexation of eastern Poland.

So it was then – on August 25, 1939 – that Yalta took place. It was on that day, and not in 1945, that Great Britain sold Poland, which it had deceived, to its dream ally, Joseph Stalin. Beck, if he had been a true statesman, after reading the text of the proposed "alliance" agreement, should have grabbed his head, jumped out into the street in his long johns, and ordered a cab driver to take him to the station to catch the last train to Berlin...

French General Bernard Serrigny, author of *the* famous *Réflexions sur l'art de la guerre*, wrote that "intelligence is the art of foresight." If so, Beck was unfortunately not very intelligent. Since the British did not guarantee our eastern border, Beck should have asked himself why.

The problem is that Beck seems to be a man who did not really think about the future, and long-term planning was something alien to him. At the end of these reflections, let us try to imagine the course of events as our foreign minister imagined them. Let us try to penetrate the colonel's psyche and his fantastic mirages.

The fact that he completely ignored the Soviet threat weighs most heavily on his already disastrous legacy. His breakneck policy of balancing between Western democracies and the Third Reich might not have had such catastrophic consequences if there had been a wall or an ocean behind us in the East. If the Soviets, lying in wait for the nearest opportunity to destroy Poland, simply did not exist.

However, this was not the case. The Soviets existed and were just waiting to pounce on a weakened Poland. Even if the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact had not been signed, and the war had unfolded as Józef Beck, Edward Śmigły-Rydz, and his staff had predicted, the Republic of Poland would still have fallen into Stalin's clutches at the end of the war. It would have found itself under the occupation of a sinister communist empire and fallen victim to brutal Sovietization.

Let me repeat once again how Beck imagined events would unfold once he realized that his policy of deterring Germany had failed and war was inevitable. It would look something like this

something like this: the ideological differences between the Soviets and the Germans prove so great that the Soviets do not enter into any pacts with Hitler. A weak Stalin declares neutrality during World War II, and military operations take place only between the Polish-Anglo-French coalition and the German-Italian coalition. The Soviets do not intervene.

Poland bravely stands up to Hitler, but of course, it eventually has to surrender. Our forces holding out in the so-called Romanian bridgehead prolongs the war by several weeks, maybe even months. By the end of 1939, however, it's all over. Warsaw surrenders. All of Poland falls under German occupation. From 1940, the main burden of the war shifts to the West. Fighting takes place along the Maginot Line. Only the partisans are active in conquered Poland.

It lasts a year, two, three, four – our staff and diplomats did not make such detailed calculations – but eventually the Reich begins to falter and finally collapses. Beck, sitting in London or Paris, can breathe a sigh of relief. Hitler signs the surrender, German troops withdraw from occupied Poland. Thanks to its allies, the Republic regains its independence, and Beck returns triumphantly to Warsaw – or rather, to what was left of it after several years of German occupation – where he is greeted by sparse but enthusiastic crowds. Of course, for its courageous stance, Poland receives East Prussia from the grateful English and French.

Everything is beautiful, all the pieces of the puzzle fit together perfectly, but one thing remains. "A minor issue." One element we overlooked. What was Stalin doing at the time? Did Beck really imagine that the Soviet dictator would sit idly by, chew on his pipe in anger, and say, "What a clever fellow Beck is! He showed me how to play big-time politics." This is absurd, even incredibly naive. It is hard to believe that a grown man of 45 believed such a thing. I will repeat: Beck's biggest mistake was not so much underestimating Hitler as completely ignoring the Soviet threat. Our foreign minister conducted his entire policy as if the Soviet Union did not exist. It was a mistake with fatal consequences for the state – and for Beck himself.

What Beck was doing on the eve of World War II was not even wishful thinking, because even this traditional Polish discipline must be based on at least a shadow of probability. These were the delusions of a man completely detached from reality. It is inconceivable that the Polish foreign minister could have reasoned so naively.

It seems, however, that Beck did not read the reports placed on his desk. Every single analysis prepared for Beck by Sovietologists from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the late 1930s assumed that, as one of them put it, “the Soviets will wait until the end and intervene in the final phase of the war in order to grab as much as they can for themselves.” Polish diplomats spoke openly about this; it was the official line of our Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Here are two characteristic opinions. British diplomat William Strang, who was in Warsaw in June, heard from his Polish colleagues: "We do not believe that the Soviets, despite any agreements, will decide to take part in the conflict from the outset. Their policy is moving in the opposite direction. They will not worry when the conflict breaks out, they will remain neutral and, with their weapons at the ready, will wait for the right moment to intervene.”

On May 5, 1939, Jan Szembek sent the following analysis to diplomatic missions: "In the event of an armed conflict in Europe, the Soviets would like to avoid a situation in which they would be immediately and directly involved with all their forces, and they want to preserve as much of their unused forces as possible for the critical moment of the war."

Since our diplomats and commanders were convinced that the Soviet Union would only intervene militarily at the end of the war, it is really difficult to understand what these gentlemen were counting on. If World War II had indeed unfolded as Józef Stalin had predicted,

Beck, meaning that if Germany lost the war on the Western Front but defeated Poland first, he himself would have nowhere to return to after such a "victory." And even if he decided to take such a desperate step, instead of going to the Brühl Palace, he would end up straight from Okęcie Airport to Rakowiecka Street—in the clutches of the Security Office.

He himself predicted that the Soviet Union would enter the scene in the final phase of the war. Thus, after the capitulation of the Third Reich, defeated by Great Britain and France, the Red Army would immediately fill the vacuum left by the German occupation troops leaving Poland. The Bolsheviks would have gone west in the wake of the retreating Germans, just as they did in 1918, when the German Empire capitulated and the Ober-Ost troops began packing their bags and returning home.

At that time, the attempt to conquer Poland ended in defeat for the Soviets and victory for the Poles, who repelled the Bolsheviks on the outskirts of Warsaw in 1920. And what would we have opposed the Red Army with in 1944 or 1945 after several years of brutal occupation of Poland by the Third Reich? Our underground army? Bottles of gasoline? Our brave children eager to join the barricades? One thing is certain: Great Britain would not have lifted a finger in our defense. Just as it did not lift a finger in 1945. Józef Beck would have rushed breathlessly to Churchill and indignantly demanded that war be declared on the Soviet Union in defense of Poland.

And Churchill could only shrug his shoulders, take the agreement of August 25, 1939, out of his desk, and shove it under Beck's nose. The document stated in black and white that His Majesty's government was only committed to defending Poland against Germany... And then the Downing Street janitor would grab Beck by the scruff of his neck and throw him out the door, just as Mikołajczyk had been thrown out in reality.

At this stage, history would have unfolded in exactly the same way as it did after 1945. The Soviets would have taken Poland while the Anglo-Saxons remained passive. If the British were not eager to die for German Gdańsk in 1939, they would have been even less willing to die for Polish Vilnius, Lviv, and Warsaw in 1945.

Józef Piłsudski understood this threat very well... During one of his last meetings with officers from the General Staff, the Marshal asked them a fundamental question: Which poses a greater threat to Poland, Germany or the Soviet Union? A discussion ensued, which the Marshal himself summed up. He had no doubt that, in the long term, the Bolsheviks were more dangerous to Poland. "For," Piłsudski pointed out, "Poland could always obtain some political or military assistance from the Western powers against Germany. Against the Soviet Union – never."

"Piłsudski's assessment is one of the most accurate political statements in the entire history of Poland," believed Jerzy Łojek. "Indeed, in 1939, Poland received political support from France and Great Britain in the form of a declaration of war, although without any real military assistance. However, it remained completely isolated in relation to the Soviet Union."

It was therefore obvious that in order to win the war, it was first necessary to defeat the Soviet Union together with Germany, and only then – once the threat of the Anglo-French-Soviet alliance had disappeared – could alliances be peacefully formed with the Western Allies. Then these countries would really need us, as they would have no other ally to choose from in the east. Nor would they have anyone to sell us to.

"Only when the Bolshevik military and political machine lay in ruins," wrote Kazimierz Okulicz, "would an alliance between Poland, with its territory and entire military apparatus at its disposal, and Great Britain against the further spread of German conquest be an effective and valuable instrument both for Poland and for the whole of Europe." an alliance between Poland, with its territory and entire military apparatus at its disposal, and Great Britain against the further spread of German conquest would be an effective and valuable instrument for both Poland and its ally. I am by no means turning a blind eye to

serious dangers of this policy for Poland. But each of these dangers was less than the one we jumped into without hesitation or reflection in August 1939.

"The lack of political reflection in Warsaw in the 1930s on the fragility of Polish independence – between two great totalitarian states – is puzzling," wrote Łojek. Unfortunately, serious reflection was replaced by bravado and wishful thinking.

What Beck failed to understand was understood even by Ribbentrop, who said to Józef Lipski on March 21, 1939: "Either Poland will remain a nation state, cooperating with Germany on reasonable terms... or one day a Marxist Polish government will be established, which will then be absorbed by Bolshevik Russia." And so it happened.

Why wasn't Stanisław Swianiewicz our foreign minister, for example?

"I considered the hard-won independence to be a great good and a great treasure," wrote the professor, "which we must not recklessly jeopardize by entering into a war which, at least in its initial stages, was bound to bring us defeat. Therefore, I believed that every effort should be made to avoid this war. I was convinced that since Hitler began his intensive rearmament campaign in 1934, and especially since Germany occupied the Rhineland in 1936, thus greatly hindering our ability to receive effective French assistance, our chances of repelling a German attack were very slim. This was due to the configuration of our borders, especially since Hitler occupied Slovakia in 1939. At that point, we were effectively caught in a German military pincer movement.

The second factor was the difference in our industrial potential. Even if, by some miracle, we had managed to defend our Central Industrial Region, our steel production—and thus our ability to produce the main means of warfare—would still have been incomparable to that of the German Reich.

The third element of my thinking was the conviction that any involvement in the war in the West would mean the occupation of our eastern territories by Russia. Of course, I could not predict at what stage of the war this would happen and under what pretext the Soviet Union would enter these lands – whether as an enemy, a “friend,” an ally of Germany, or perhaps an ally of the West. This would, of course, depend on the circumstances. I also had no doubt that Russia's entry into our eastern provinces would mean the end of Polish influence and Polish possessions there.

This is precisely what makes the situation created by Józef Beck so tragic. Poland's accession to the Anglo-French coalition against Germany in 1939 was bound to result in the loss of Polish independence to the Soviet Union in the long run. Regardless of whether the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact had been signed or not. After Germany's collapse, Stalin would have taken over Poland, devastated by occupation, anyway. So what was Beck hoping for? It is truly difficult to understand.

So, allow me to quote once again what I consider to be the most important sentence in this book, which constitutes its essence and main thesis.

Poland could have regained full independence and sovereignty after World War II only if the Soviet Union had been defeated before Germany.

Only if the scenario from the end of World War I had been realized – that is, the defeat of both of our historical enemies – could we have dreamed of rebuilding the state. Therefore, we had to act in a way that would contribute to this. In the first phase of the war, we had to fight the Soviets alongside the Germans, and in the second phase, we had to fight the Germans alongside the Western democracies. This was the only path to freedom, but also to power. Those who write that the history of Poland is a history of missed opportunities are truly right...

...Meanwhile, three days after the signing of the Polish-British agreement, on August 28, Hitler issued one last ultimatum to Poland, demanding not only Gdańsk and the motorway, but also the Corridor and Silesia. Beck was to come to Berlin immediately to discuss the matter. The ultimatum was rejected, and the Führer told his associates: "I will come up with something so diabolical for the Poles tonight that they will choke on it." Between 1939 and 1945, he fulfilled this promise to the letter...

On September 1, the worn-out training battleship *Schleswig-Holstein* approached the shore under cover of night. At a given signal, it opened fire with all its guns, including four 280 mm caliber guns mm. The powerful explosions of quarter-ton shells announced to the world the beginning of the greatest conflict in human history. A conflict that would last six years, claim tens of millions of victims, and devastate three continents.

However, the missiles did not fall on Western Europe, as Adolf Hitler had originally planned, but on Poland. World War II began with us and affected us the most. It was the work of Józef Beck, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland. However, it did not have to be that way. Our history could have taken a different course.

Chapter 29

Władysław Studnicki

Everything I have included in the book you have just read has one serious flaw. It was written post factum. It could therefore be argued that it is easy today, with the benefit of more than seventy years of hindsight, to judge Józef Beck and his decisions. We know how disastrous the long-term consequences of his choices were, but he could not have foreseen this. By deciding to declare war on Germany under the worst possible conditions for Poland and at the worst possible moment for Poland, our minister simply did not know what he was doing.

The course of World War II was unpredictable. Minister Beck and his colleagues cannot be expected to have known the scenario of the struggle for hegemony in Europe. Unfortunately, such criticism of the architects of Polish foreign policy in the 1930s still continues," wrote Marek Kornat in his *book Polska 1939 roku wobec paktu Ribbentrop–Mołotow* (Poland in 1939 in the face of the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact).

Such arguments must be rejected. First, it is the duty of the foreign minister to anticipate the consequences of his actions and to exercise caution. This is especially true when walking a tightrope over an abyss with the entire nation on his shoulders. This was the situation Poland found itself in on the eve of World War II. Secondly, the catastrophe that Beck's decision brought upon the Republic could have been foreseen. And in detail. This was done by the conservative politician and journalist Władysław Studnicki. He alerted Beck to this matter, but Beck ignored his warnings.

Finally, I decided to add an extensive excerpt from the biography of Władysław Studnicki, which I am currently working on. In it, I describe his actions before the outbreak of World War II, after Beck accepted the ill-fated British guarantees.

But let us start with who our hero was. Born in 1867 in Daugavpils, Studnicki belonged to the "rebellious generation," raised in the spirit of mourning after the defeat of the January Uprising.

His hatred of Russia and almost fanatical patriotism quickly turned him towards independence activities, which he undertook as part of the socialist movement. As a result, he spent eight months in Warsaw's Citadel (1888) and then six years in Siberia (1889–1896). Although after his return from exile he even held one of the leading positions in the PPS, he soon broke with the socialist movement, which he considered insufficiently pro-independence.

In search of parties that would incorporate his idea of ruthless struggle against the tsarist regime into their programs, Studnicki joined the Polish People's Party (PSL) (1901–1902) and then the National Democratic Party (1902–1905). However, he left the latter when he saw that it was becoming increasingly closer to Moscow. In 1910, he wrote his famous book *Sprawa polska* (The Polish Cause). “Forging weapons! Create military forces, an active force, a bearer of the spirit of sacrifice, an attitude of rising from the fall,” he urged in its pages.

During World War I, he negotiated with the Germans in Warsaw. He tried to convince Governor Hans Beseler to restore Polish statehood. As German Minister Matthias Erzberger wrote in his memoirs, it was Studnicki who was the father of the act of November 5, 1916, which revived Poland. When it was announced, Studnicki headed the Polish Nationalists' Club, which he had founded, and took a seat on the Provisional Council of State.

In the Second Polish Republic, he focused on journalism and writing. He published a number of books, including *the* famous *The Political System of Europe with Poland* at its Head. He was considered a "leading

Polish Germanophile" because he advocated a Polish-German alliance against the Soviets and the creation of a Central European Bloc on this basis. He warned against an alliance with Western countries, which, in his opinion, would not be able to provide Poland with any help.

At the end of the 1930s, he began to exert an increasing influence on conservative journalists. Among his disciples were Stanisław Mackiewicz and Adolf Bocheński, whom we know well. Many of his ideas were adopted by Jerzy Giedroyc's circle
and the conservative Vilnius-based Słowo. His geopolitical concepts of a Polish-German alliance also had a huge resonance in the Reich, where he was eagerly translated and listened to.

In 1936, Rudolf Hess even invited Studnicki as a guest of honor to the NSDAP Parteitag in Nuremberg. There, he had the opportunity to meet Hitler and other leading activists of the party. He even had a conversation lasting several hours with Joachim von Ribbentrop on the subject of European politics. During the war, he tried unsuccessfully to soften the occupation policy and convince the Germans that their brutal policy towards the Poles was madness.

He argued that only by reaching an agreement with the Poles would they be able to defeat the Soviet Union. However, the Germans – even though he traveled to Berlin for meetings with Goebbels and wrote desperate letters to Hitler – were no longer listening to him at that point. He was first placed in a sanatorium near Berlin, then held in Pawiak prison. Although he failed to bring about a change in Berlin's policy towards Warsaw, his connections with the Germans allowed him to rescue many people from the Gestapo's dungeons.

After the war, he naturally went into exile. It was not difficult to predict what fate would have befallen him in Soviet-occupied Poland. He died in London in 1953. Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz believed that he was the most underrated and forgotten Polish politician and ideologist, one of the four fathers of Polish independence, alongside Piłsudski, Dmowski, and Bobrzyński.

Despite this, many "orthodox" Poles considered and still consider Studnicki to be almost a traitor who dared to have a different opinion than the majority of his nation. He is criticized primarily by the left, but also by the right wing of nationalist, Endecki origin.

At this point, I would like to quote a few characteristic opinions that best reflect who Władysław Studnicki really was.

Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz: "He is short in stature, and now in his old age he looks even smaller. He spoke without stumbling, without repeating himself, argument after argument forming a great, logical whole. For me, Studnicki is not an economist, not a politician, he is simply
'some kind of Polish saint'. His character can only be compared to those people of the Middle Ages who, against all odds, against society, against the church hierarchy, defended their truth.

They defended it against all odds, receiving only criticism from everyone for doing so; they defended it only because they considered it to be the truth, out of a sense of sacred duty. People often considered them crazy. Throughout his life, Studnicki was not interested in stupid medals or titles, money, honors, or the satisfaction of ambition – he always outraged everyone because he always preached what he considered to be good for Poland. No one loved Poland more selflessly – no one – at least as far as my historical knowledge goes.

It was always the same. This man, typical of the beautiful 19th century, always believed that he could convince with logic, convince with arguments, convince with logical statements. And always, a cliché stinking of a musty feather bed, the most hideous cliché, followed him like a vengeful Erinyes of Polishness and echoed, like a monstrous echo, the purity of his thoughts and his wonderful intentions.

It was not for nothing that Henryk Sienkiewicz called Władysław Studnicki "Podbipięta" (the High-Heeled One).

Józef Mackiewicz: "When we say 'a nineteenth-century man,' we should not understand this to mean a man of a certain type. Quite the opposite, in fact. People of that era were characterized by infinite individuality, and this is perhaps what distinguished them most from the collective types of today's era. Studnicki was an individualist among individualists; with a fiery character, a political temperament, and a small stature, but with a great spirit, and not in the figurative sense of the word. And in this sense: if Studnicki had been offered a billion dollars to say one word against his conviction, Studnicki would not have said even half a word against his conviction. The reader naturally thinks that this is a metaphor. No, it is literally: for no earthly goods.

Yes, this is undoubtedly a crucial question: how did it happen, how could it happen at all, that one of the greatest patriots that Polish soil has ever known could suddenly be considered almost a traitor? Just because he had a different opinion (in this supposedly "nation of individualists"!!), because he put forward a different political concept, because he promoted a different recipe for political alliances? This could not have happened to him in the 19th century. It must have been, it certainly was, a great tragedy for Studnicki.

Barbara Toporska: “He lived until his damp death in London with one obsession – Poland. There were hundreds of anecdotes about his absent-mindedness. Lost hats chased him, umbrellas looked for him, battered briefcases, constantly forgotten keys. He was a man who was perfectly absent-minded about everything that was not the Polish Cause. He never forgot the dates of political meetings or what he was supposed to say. It consumed him, absorbed him, and somehow tempered him. He lived on semolina porridge. He wore old clothes. How did he not get lost? How did he get on the right trains? I think it was only because they were logically connected to his obsession.

It is difficult to comment when the subject is a man who took asceticism to the point of almost completely abandoning his personal emotions, ambitions, and needs. Patriots of all countries should hold him up as an abstract ideal. So how could the Ideal Patriot be boycotted by standardized patriots? In politics, there is no mercy for losers. Studnicki was a politician. Studnicki lost. Agreed. But his political adversaries also lost. After all, Poland was at stake. The communists won People's Poland. And before that, Beck also lost.

And finally, once again, *Stanisław Mackiewicz*: "The Polish nation can be proud to produce such people. Let those who mistreated them be ashamed, for they are mostly unworthy of tying the laces on their shoes."

I hope you will forgive me for this lengthy introduction. However, I wanted to shed light on the figure of Władysław Studnicki in order to place his actions during the period of March–September 1939, which is of interest to us, in the proper context. Let us begin with the fact that Józef Beck's acceptance of British guarantees simply froze the 72-year-old Studnicki. While our head of diplomacy was celebrating his "huge success," Studnicki was clutching his head in despair.

On April 13, a week after Beck's ill-fated visit to London, the "leading Polish Germanophile" wrote him a letter. "Chamberlain's declaration, which prompted Poland's statement on reciprocity, must cause concern among those who fear the unfortunate consequences of Poland abandoning its neutrality and siding with the Western Powers," he wrote.

He warned Beck that "once it becomes clear that we will be against them in this war," Germany will strike the Republic without hesitation. As he argued, having enemies on two fronts, they will first have to eliminate the weaker one. Therefore, Studnicki urged Beck not to make any "secret commitments to France and England under any circumstances, as their discovery could provoke an attack by the Reich."

He emphasized that the German occupation of Czechoslovakia ruled out the possibility of waging war against the Third Reich. Poland because would be attacked "from the north, from the west and from the south" and quickly crushed in a "mobile campaign" lasting no more than six weeks. He warned against any hopes for real help from the French and British sitting behind the Maginot Line.

He went on to argue: "Our army will be surrounded and forced to surrender by an army advancing from the south and west, equipped with motorized units. The second critical point is the country's capital. Its encirclement is highly probable, and disorganization as a result of air attacks is inevitable. By participating in the war, we have nothing to gain and everything to lose."

According to him, if Germany were to suffer defeat in this war, Poland, which had already been crushed by Germany, would fall prey to the Soviet Union, which was lying in wait for it: "Russia could then implement the resettlement of the Polish population, sending, for example, workers from our textile industry to Turkestan and Tashkent, miners to Siberian mines, etc. Although the Polish language would be preserved in administration and the judiciary, the greatest achievements of our literature, as a product of the nobility and bourgeoisie, would not be tolerated. Communist Poland would become part of Communist Russia."

Taking all this into account, Studnicki suggested that the Polish government should make concessions while there was still time. In return, it should seek prestigious successes elsewhere. For example, by leasing the Latvian port of Liepaja – which was possible at the time – and establishing a protectorate over Slovakia.

According to him, Poland could count on German support in these projects in exchange for its "friendly neutrality, which – in the event of war – would give Germany what it needs during the war, namely Poland's commitment not to allow Russian troops to pass through."

"History will credit you, Minister, with saving Poland from suicidal participation in the war," concluded Władysław Studnicki in his letter.

He received no reply to this letter, and tensions between Berlin and Warsaw, instead of easing, continued to grow. Studnicki therefore also wrote to Ribbentrop. Among other things, he informed him that in Poland “there is a prevailing belief that one country making concessions to another without receiving anything in return is incompatible with national honor.” In view of this, Germany should make a gesture towards the Republic of Poland and grant it influence in Slovakia on an equal footing with the German Reich.

On May 5, the day Beck delivered his famous speech on "honor," Studnicki sent a several-page memorandum on the political situation to all members of the government—with the exception of Sławoj Składkowski, whose premiership he considered "an insult to the Polish nation" – prominent figures and representatives of the general staff, *a* several-page-long *Memorandum on the political situation*. In it, he warned that Poland would suffer a quick defeat and would be exposed to several years of German occupation, which would last until the end of the war. "This occupation will be more economically exhausting and more ruthless than the occupation during the World War, as the latter was tempered by the concept of establishing the Polish state," he wrote.

As in his letter to Beck, he warned against the pipe dream of counting on help from the French and British. He referred to Lloyd George's speech delivered on April 3 in the House of Commons. The British politician candidly admitted that "if war broke out tomorrow, we could not send a single battalion to Poland."

do so either, in his opinion, as it was incapable of breaking through the German border fortifications.

Władysław Studnicki emphasized that the Soviet Union was the real partner in the war against Germany in the East, which the British and French dreamed of gaining. He therefore warned that the real danger to Poland's territorial integrity lay not in Germany's desire to take over the Free City of Gdańsk, but in a possible agreement between the Western Allies and the Bolsheviks.

Please read carefully, because the following excerpt from this memorandum is truly astonishing (remember that it was written in early May 1939): "If Germany is defeated with the cooperation of the coalition with Soviet Russia, it must be compensated, and it can only be compensated at our expense. Great Britain, in its press and parliamentary speeches, constantly considers our acquisition of eastern territories to be a form of imperialism, as reprehensible as all non-English imperialism. The idea of the Curzon Line between Białystok and Brest is deeply rooted in England. They will give up our eastern territories with a clear conscience." So, in the spring of 1939, it was not only possible to predict that we would quickly lose the war with Germany, but also that at the end of the war the British would sell us to Stalin. And that half of our territory will be seized by the Soviet Union.

So what should Poland do in this situation? Studnicki's answer was simple: immediately reach an agreement with Germany. Only this could protect it from the impending catastrophe. This agreement would be based on a commitment to neutrality during their attack on France and immediate consent to the return of Gdańsk to the Reich and the construction of a motorway through the Corridor. "At this moment, it is a matter of the existence of our state, our nation," he wrote.

Studnicki argued that Poland, by following his proposed course, would not expose itself to greater risk. He did not fear war with the Soviets, especially with technical assistance from Germany. "Russia Soviet ze względu na front wewnętrzny, wywołany kołchozami i sowchozami, ze względu na czystkę w swej armii, ze względu na Japonię nie jest niebezpiecznym przeciwnikiem".

Of course, there was no response again. Beck did not want to receive him, Śmigły-Rydz did not want to meet him. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Studnicki was desperate at the time. He knew that his country was like a speeding locomotive on a dead-end track, heading straight for disaster. And he could not do anything about it.

"I was strongly opposed to him," Stanisław Wachowiak recalled years later in Zeszyty Historyczne. "Later, I became convinced that he was one of the greatest personalities I had ever met. In my entire life, I have never seen many internal tragedies like the one that Władysław Studnicki went through."

A leading Polish Germanophile, he organized dozens of meetings and lectures. He tried to alert as many people as possible. One of the meetings with him was organized by Jerzy Giedroyc at the Polityka premises on Długa Street in Warsaw. Apart from Studnicki, the attendees included Prince Eustachy Sapieha, Colonel Stefan Mayer, head of Department II of the General Staff, and Kazimierz Zdziechowski. The latter recalled that Studnicki's speech differed from that of "what the masses believed and what they were told to believe."

Contrary to official propaganda, Studnicki expressed doubts as to whether "the Polish army is really as good and well-armed as is generally claimed, and whether it is capable of facing the enemy in the event of a conflict." Giedroyc remembered another meeting with Studnicki at the Polityka editorial office during one of the "club meetings" held there. Several senior officers of the Polish Army participated in the discussion, including Colonel Jan Kowalewski, who later, in 1940, after the capitulation of France, also proved to be a supporter of compromise with the Reich.

“One of the colonels spoke about preparations for war. After listening to him, Studnicki said: ‘But if there is a war, we are bound to lose.’ There was a dead silence, full of tension, which somehow dissipated. But that dead silence stuck in my memory,” wrote Giedroyc.

The eminent Polish writer Ferdynand Goetel also never forgot his meetings with Studnicki on the eve of World War II. In an atmosphere of widespread optimism – which, incidentally, also affected him at the time – he encountered only two “warning voices.” The first was a "short street conversation with former Air Force Chief Gen. Ludomił Rayski," and the second was a meeting with Władysław Studnicki in one of the capital's cafés.

"The gray-haired and, as they said, 'crazy' professor caught up with me here after submitting his famous memorandum," recalled Goetel. "Very excited, almost desperate, he painted a bleak picture of the course of the war and its consequences and tried to find in me an ally in opposing the 'madness' that had taken hold of the nation from top to bottom...

"Russia will win this war!" he argued. "Can't you really see what awaits us? You are capable of thinking for yourself, after all."

I did not share his opinion [at the time]. He struck me as a maniac.

The close contacts that Studnicki maintained on the eve of World War II with a group of Piłsudski supporters gathered around Walery Sławek, with whom he had friendly relations at the time, also seem particularly interesting. According to Studnicki, he was
"a staunch opponent of our participation in the war and his strong ally." As I have already written, on April 2, 1939, when Beck was traveling to London to accept British guarantees – he committed suicide. It cannot be ruled out, that it was precisely in a desperate gesture of opposition to Beck's policy, who, betraying Piłsudski's political testament, was pushing Poland into the abyss.

Meanwhile, concerned about Studnicki's activities, Prime Minister Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski considered in late spring 1939 whether to imprison him in Bereza Kartuska, as had already happened to Stanisław Mackiewicz. However, as Studnicki's son Konrad told me, several influential generals, including Chief of Staff Wacław Stachiewicz, reportedly opposed this.

Studnicki would probably have been sent to Bereza for "defeatism," as he loudly expressed his extremely critical assessment of the state of the Polish army and its chances against the Wehrmacht. He considered the government slogan "strong, united, and ready" and the official hurrah-optimism not only absurd, but downright dangerous. He knew that the Polish army did not have enough heavy equipment to face the Wehrmacht.

The Republic of Poland's defensive capabilities against Germany were exacerbated by its hopeless geographical location. "I became increasingly skeptical about the combat value of our army," he recalled two years later. In the first days of May, he watched the parades taking place in Warsaw at the time. Thanks to his good relationship with the Warsaw police commander, he always had excellent seats in the stands.

"I experienced today's defeats on May 3, 1939. The military parade, which delighted the audience, tore my heart apart. The army, which will bleed to the detriment of Poland in an unnecessary war," he recalled. "Several tanks drove by, several hundred machine guns were displayed, the infantry marched bravely, and brave cavalrymen sat on beautiful horses. The admiration was enormous. However, it was an army for a parade." "Our stupid generals think they can win the war," he added irritably during one of the discussions at the time.

Stanisław Swianiewicz recalled: "Against the currents of patriotic, boastful, ready for the highest sacrifices, but devoid of a sense of reality Polish opinion, as has often happened in Polish history, there was one man of small stature, but with a penetrating mind, a big heart, and inexhaustible courage: Władysław Studnicki.".

Studnicki himself wrote that "the Polish authorities and Polish opinion were rushing towards war."

And further:

"While serious minds were concerned about the situation, the crowd was becoming increasingly agitated by the press, which was lying to them, writing about hunger in Germany and the poor state of Germany's armaments."

An example of the government's irresponsible attitude was the "sea festival" held in July. "We will not be pushed away from the sea" – these were the slogans displayed on various buildings, noted Studnicki. "They remind me of painted Chinese dragons, which are supposed to scare off the enemy. This cry from Beck's speech was cheap demagoguery designed to win the applause of the crowd and gain popularity. Our current policy does not secure the sea for us; on the contrary, it will push us away from the sea."

Although many people agreed with him during the discussions at that time, due to the unpopularity of such views, they were reluctant to speak openly about it and joined in the general enthusiasm. Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz wrote: "In 1939, I was opposed to war on two fronts. I knew what Beck, Składkowski, and Rydz did not understand, namely that a German invasion would be followed by a Russian invasion. From time to time, I muttered this privately to someone, but otherwise, seeing that the mood of the nation was going in a completely different direction, I just shrugged my shoulders and spread my hands. Studnicki was not only a greater citizen than me at the time, but also a much more prescient politician. Studnicki was threatened with being put in a mental hospital if he began to undermine the slogan "Strong, united, ready." Well, it was logical. In a society gripped by widespread madness, the only sane person belonged in a mental hospital.

Studnicki could not understand why so many seemingly sensible people ignored the obvious facts and indulged in carefree wishful thinking. "I think to myself, they've all been bought," he wrote on July 9. “Unconditionally, not literally. Neither France nor England gave them [money, after all. They proclaim such views] to maintain their position, to curry favor with their superiors or the general public. They are sacrificing, in fact selling, the Polish cause.”

The most important thing Studnicki did to turn Poland away from the disastrous course chosen by Beck was to write a pamphlet in June 1939 *entitled Wobec nadchodzącej II-ej wojny światowej* (In the Face of the Coming Second World War). According to Ksawery Pruszyński, who had the opportunity to read it at the time, it was prophetic. Studnicki's son, Konrad, recalled that "it was written in despair."

"I wrote a book against our participation in the world war," Studnicki recalled a few months later, "assuming that the antagonism between territorially hungry and territorially saturated countries must lead to a world war, and that Poland's place is on the side of the territorially hungry countries. In my opinion, the Polish-German conflict had less objective grounds than the Anglo-German conflict. I did not consider the English guarantee to be a means of securing Poland's development or even its existence; on the contrary, I considered it a factor drawing us into a dangerous war, the consequences of which would be catastrophic for us. I argued that Poland was strong as an ally of Germany, because its technical deficiencies could be supplemented by German technology, engines, airplanes, and Germany's organizational skills, whereas Poland was weak as Germany's armed antagonist.

The book contains an appeal to the common sense of those who have come to rule Poland. "It is not anxiety or impulsiveness, but analysis of our situation, our raison d'état, and understanding of the current political situation that can protect us from missteps that may take their toll on us, our children, and many generations to come."

He again warned against placing faith in France. "It is natural," he wrote, "that a nation with no population growth, but rather a decline in population, should be very sparing with its blood. Today, the vast majority of the French press is calling for the defense of Gdańsk, but this is not

not about defending Poland's interests, but about drawing Poland into an anti-German coalition." British guarantees, he warned, were also a fiction.

"England and France would very much like to see a Russian-German border established, counting on Russia's help in the fight against Germany," he wrote. Poland, on the other hand, was to play only the role of a diversionary force, which would draw the brunt of the first German attack, giving Great Britain the necessary time to create and organize its own armed forces. "The English opinion was and is convinced that everything Poland received outside this line [Curzon's line] is a product of imperialism, an act of aggression to the detriment of Russia. This is a very important moment for forecasting Great Britain's attitude towards the eastern provinces of Poland in the event of Soviet Russia's participation in the war."

And further: "English radio proclaims that the English will not fight for Gdańsk under any circumstances. However, the greatest danger from England lies in its desire for Soviet Russia to join the coalition. But what can Russia pay for this participation? Only Polish lands, only our east, i.e., the provinces lying beyond the Bug and San rivers. The [British] declaration does not formally violate the non-aggression pact with Germany concluded in 1934, but it was treated by Germany as Poland's entry into an alliance with the enemy camp on the eve of war. This may have dire consequences for Poland. In a war on two fronts, the weaker opponent is usually eliminated first, and Poland is the weaker one, so the world war may begin with a Polish-German war.

Studnicki emphasized that, in view of the efforts to conclude a British-Soviet alliance, Poland's association with Great Britain would be political and national suicide. “If Germany is to be our enemy,” he appealed, “we must have an objective understanding of its economic and military strength, otherwise we may face painful disappointment. A false perception of the enemy's strength creates a very aggressive mood, very unyielding before the war; and during the war, the first difficulties cause panic. Underestimating the enemy's strength leads to insufficient preparation and a whole series of reckless steps."

He reminded that the main factor behind Germany's strength was "its superiority in the mechanical and chemical industries." He believed that "whoever produces the best machines can produce the best cannons and machine guns." He continued: "In our journalism, and especially in the press, there is a tendency today to downplay and disregard Germany's strength. This may have serious repercussions on our policy, increasing the likelihood of war. It may take its toll on our forces preparing for a possible war and during the war itself, when it turns out that the enemy is completely different and does not have the shortcomings that we talk about at every turn today."

Returning to the issue of Gdańsk and the motorway, Studnicki wrote that “these are minor matters, while major international conflicts are looming on the horizon.” "No. Germany was not thinking about war. It was only putting forward demands that could be met without war. A dictatorship needs to show results. Hitler and his friends wanted to dazzle Germany with success. A week after the occupation of Klaipėda, they wanted to offer Gdańsk to the Führer. It was supposed to be a fireworks display, but it threw dangerous sparks onto Polish-German relations," he lamented. In this way, the Germans themselves facilitated "Poland's capture in the English trap."

Studnicki also warned that, apart from possible territorial and economic losses, involvement in the war could also result in huge human casualties. "We know what a heavy toll World War I took on all the belligerent countries," he wrote. "The coming war will be even bloodier due to improvements in artillery, military aviation, etc."

"The political situation is difficult, but not hopeless," he assured his readers, adding that "the likelihood of avoiding war in the east is greater than in the west." Everything depends on whether Poland will swallow the bitter pill and make

concessions to the Reich. To achieve this, he suggested, it was necessary to appeal to mediation and mutual friends, namely Italy, Japan, Romania, and Hungary.

Studnicki printed this brochure at his own expense at the St. Michalski and Cz. Ociepko Printing House at 28 Nowogrodzka Street in Warsaw. However, it never reached its readers. Immediately after printing was completed, on June 21, 1939, the police raided the premises and confiscated almost all copies *of Wobec nadchodzącej II-ej wojny światowej* (In the Face of the Coming Second World War). Outraged, Studnicki immediately wrote a letter about the matter to Józef Beck. However, this did not help.

When the confiscation of the book was not revoked, Studnicki decided to challenge it in court. The trial, held behind closed doors, took place in July. In the courtroom, he gave a passionate speech in which he defended his arguments and pointed out that Poland would face disaster if Beck did not change course quickly. However, he lost the case. The decision to confiscate the book was not overturned.

During the occupation, a young lawyer who was practicing in court at the time revealed to Studnicki that his speech had shaken the judge. After the trial, he reportedly said:
"I feel that Studnicki is right, but my hands were tied. The confiscation order was a direct order from the prime minister."

Discouraged and devastated after losing the trial, Studnicki went to Rabka, where his son was spending his summer vacation. He most likely arrived there on August 12 or 13 and stayed with his son and his nanny at the Sobiepan guesthouse. As Konrad Studnicki recalled, "he was depressed and taciturn; he went on long solitary walks, from which he returned even more depressed."

"It was probably the hardest period of my life," wrote Władysław Studnicki in his memoirs from that time. "When I heard the sound of marching troops at night, my heart sank, because I could feel the approaching catastrophe. Images of the impending defeat flashed through my mind, but I must admit that reality exceeded anything even the wildest imagination could have suggested."

The biggest blow for him was the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact, the danger of which, unlike Beck, he understood immediately and without error. His worst fears were confirmed by Adolf Hitler's ultimatum to the Republic of Poland on August 28. Not only did the Führer make another demand – to hold a plebiscite in Pomerania – but, worse still, one of the countries that was to supervise its implementation was to be the Soviet Union.

It was this point in the ultimatum that most concerned Studnicki. “In this way, Hitler emphasized his departure from anti-Soviet policy and made it clear that Russia was invited to participate in the partition of Poland. It was a warning signal for Poland, a signal ignored by the government and society,” he later wrote.

"My position was incomprehensible to many," he recalled. "Do you think you can overcome public opinion or influence the government and prevent war? You are only putting yourself at risk." To this I replied: If everyone who thinks like me were willing to put themselves at risk for the sake of the cause, we would probably win and prevent disaster. Anyway, if it is not possible to save the nation and the state from destruction, then we must save our national honor by proving that not everyone was thoughtless."

On the eve of World War II, Władysław Studnicki remained an unheeded prophet. Poland did not avoid the catastrophe he predicted, which it happily ran towards. If anyone deserves a monument in the central square in Warsaw, it is him. However, this will never happen. In politics, Poles prefer platitudes and bravado to realistic thinking and common sense. Even if they have to pay the highest price for it. That is why, sooner or later, Józef Beck will have a monument in Warsaw.

Chapter 30

Conclusion

None of the numerous disasters that befell our unfortunate country in its long and tragic history can compare to the catastrophe of World War II. For Poles and representatives of other nations of the Republic, this conflict was not even a war. It was an event of apocalyptic proportions. The partitioning of the country, the Swedish Deluge, the partitions, the Eastern Front of World War I, and the Bolshevik invasion of 1920 seem like child's play compared to the catastrophe of 1939–1945.

The Second World War in the areas stretching between Gdynia and Stanisławów, between Katowice and Vilnius, was primarily a genocide. There is no family in Poland that did not lose someone close as a result of the criminal actions of the Third Reich, the Soviet Union, or Ukrainian nationalists. Several million people were killed, the elite of the Polish nation and almost all of our Jews were physically exterminated. Auschwitz, Katyn, Majdanek, Kolyma, Sobibór, Volhynia, Kharkiv – these names still evoke horror and remind us of the hecatomb of millions of our fellow citizens.

World War II was also an infrastructural disaster. As a result, Warsaw and thousands of other cities, towns, manors, villages, hamlets, and farmsteads of the Republic of Poland were reduced to rubble. Both occupiers destroyed priceless architectural monuments and temples. They burned down manors, libraries, and museums. They looted priceless works of art. They bombed or stole factories, railway stations, ports, and airports. The achievements of generations of Poles, built with great effort, were destroyed.

The Second World War also meant a severe political defeat for the Republic of Poland. Polish territories fell under the occupation of exceptionally nasty totalitarian states, the Third Reich (1939–1945) and the Soviet Union (1939–1941 and 1944–1991). Never before had we paid such a high price for our unfortunate geopolitical location – between the German hammer and the Russian anvil.

Both occupiers consistently pursued a program of breaking the backbone of the Polish people. From a proud, great nation with a magnificent tradition and considerable ambitions, we were to be transformed into a passive gray mass submitting to the will and domination of our neighbors. We were to be transformed into semi-slaves. Unfortunately, this was largely successful. The fact that the Polish nation today is only a shadow of the nation it was before 1939 is also a far-reaching consequence of World War II.

For Poland, World War II also marked the end of an era and a gigantic geopolitical defeat. As a result of the conflict of 1939–1945, the entire concept of the Polish state, which had been established 600 years earlier, in 1385, when the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania formed a union in Krewo, giving rise to the multinational Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, underwent a transformation. This is perhaps the most painful and profound consequence of the last great war.

It was during this conflict that Poland, after several hundred years of fierce rivalry with Russia for control of the area that Jerzy Giedroyc called ULB, i.e. Ukraine-Lithuania-Belarus, suffered its final defeat.

We lost the territories inhabited by Belarusians and Ukrainians to the Soviets, and the Germans murdered Polish Jews. As a result, Poland emerged from the conflict of 1939–1945 as a completely

another country. It became a small nation state, a tribal community. A Poland that Adam Mickiewicz, Henryk Sienkiewicz, or even Józef Piłsudski would probably not recognize as their homeland.

World War II was a disaster for Poland, the severe effects of which we still feel today and which will be felt by many generations to come.

It was the scale of this defeat that prompted me to reflect on the ideas presented in this book. The terrible catastrophe that befell my homeland and the unimaginable suffering endured by my compatriots during World War II provoked questions: Did it have to happen this way? Was our homeland really doomed to defeat? Did so many of our compatriots really have to die? Did we really have to lose half of our territory? Did we really have to be crushed by the communists and the National Socialists?

These questions were followed by others. If we lost the war in alliance with France and Great Britain, were these alliances the right choice? Did Minister Józef Beck really have no room for maneuver in 1939? Would it not have been better to make painful concessions in order to avoid an apocalypse?

Alternative history is often ridiculed and treated as a frivolous field. This is a mistake. Historical research involves analyzing events and decisions made in the past. How can we assess whether these decisions were right without trying to imagine the consequences that other choices would have brought? Only by comparing and considering all possible scenarios and weighing up the potential gains and losses can we ultimately conclude that a particular option was right or wrong. The disregard or even hostility with which alternative history is treated in our country seems to be a legacy of the communist era. In the People's Republic of Poland, there was a belief in historical determinism, in the inevitability of historical events leading to the victory of communism. This is very clearly illustrated by the example of 1939. The statement that "bourgeois, capitalist Poland" did not have to "go bankrupt and collapse" in order to give way to the Polish People's Republic was considered a thought crime by the communists. Unfortunately, the habits and thought patterns of that era are still alive today.

In 1939, Poland did not have a good choice. Faced with the impending clash between European powers, it could no longer maintain its sovereignty. It could not avoid war. A thorough analysis of all three options available to Poland – an alliance with the Western powers, an alliance with the Soviets, and an alliance with Germany – leads to the conclusion that only the latter offered some room for maneuver and hope for regaining full independence after the war. Above all, only such an alliance could save millions of Poles from extermination.

Unfortunately, any attempt to discuss this topic has been suppressed in Poland so far. Although this conclusion has been reached by such distinguished researchers as Jerzy Łojek, Paweł Wieczorkiewicz, and Grzegorz Górski, as well as journalists Mieczysław Pruszyński, Kazimierz Okulicz, Rafał Ziemkiewicz, and most recently Andrzej Wielowieyski, these voices have either been silenced or dismissed as "unpatriotic" or "undermining Poland's contribution to World War II." How many times have I heard similar accusations directed at me?

When I published an interview with Professor Wieczorkiewicz in Rzeczpospolita in 2005, in which he spoke in favor of a Polish-German alliance in 1939, the academic community was in an uproar. One of Poland's leading historians, a man considered a moral authority, stopped speaking to Professor Wieczorkiewicz. Not only that, he urged other researchers to boycott him, simply because he had a different view of political events from more than sixty years ago. A group of young radical assistant professors took action behind Wieczorkiewicz's back to oust him from the Historical Institute of the University of Warsaw and deprive him of his job.

Fortunately, neither this nor a boycott took place. It is characteristic, however, that among the group of researchers hurling thunderbolts and expressing holy indignation at Wieczorkiewicz, there were even historians who served the communists during the Polish People's Republic and wrote that Poland should have pursued a pro-Soviet policy in 1939 and voluntarily surrendered to Stalin. To this day, they see nothing wrong with General Sikorski signing a pact with Stalin in 1941. They see nothing wrong with Operation Tempest. While collaboration with the criminal Soviet Union is nothing wrong for them, the idea that we could ally ourselves with Germany causes them holy moral outrage.

There are three reasons for this situation. First, the memory of the terrible atrocities committed by the Germans against Polish citizens between 1939 and 1945. This means that any talk of reaching an agreement with Germany automatically provokes a very emotional reaction. This reaction is completely understandable, but unfortunately not logical. Such an alliance would have been formed before the Germans began murdering Poles and, as a result, would have prevented all these murders from ever happening.

The second reason, which can no longer be justified, is the Poles' pathological aversion to any original thought, to any concept that breaks with established patterns of thinking and intellectual dogmas established by "moral authorities."

Thirdly, finally – attachment to a sugar-coated, infantile vision of history, in which we were always right and never made any mistakes. “In our monographs, the person being praised immediately becomes a knight without blemish or flaw, shining with the dullness of all the virtues in the world, free from all sins and mistakes, in short, becoming a true saint, if not of the Catholic Church, then certainly of the national Polish church,” wrote Ksawery Pruszyński. "The first monographs in Poland were, as we know, biographies of saints, and these medieval models had a significant influence on this type of writing."

Even if there are attempts today to debunk or critically examine the actions of Poles during World War II, they concern episodic and marginal issues, such as anti-Semitic excesses. The only serious and fundamental dispute that took place in our country concerned the meaning of the Warsaw Uprising. And even then, those who dared to expose the senselessness of this tragic battle were showered with invective. They were denied patriotism or even decency.

The attitude of Polish academic circles, especially older researchers, does not help the matter either. Here is what Professor Paweł Wieczorkiewicz told me shortly before his death: “I have a very poor opinion of Polish historians, and I say this with regret. They are a group of people with a very conservative way of thinking. They are unable to imagine that reality could have been different from what they believe it to be. They formed their views and theories by reading the works of their predecessors, who worked under communist oppression. Polish historians are an intellectually ossified group. I accuse Polish historians of a lack of imagination and flexibility, of an inability to break away from patterns. And in the generation of sixty-year-olds, these are patterns developed in the People's Republic of Poland. We are all prisoners of them. We repeat stereotypical, erroneous judgments over and over again and pass them on to our students. A historian is a person who should be open to new ideas. They should approach the issues they study with a fresh perspective, rejecting everything that was written in the People's Republic of Poland. They should put forward the craziest theories and questions, because there is a seed of genius in madness. The work of a historian is to ask questions, not to repeat the same answers over and over again. My proposal is as follows: let's completely erase the entire written history of Poland after 1939 and write it anew!

Let's look at how World War II is presented in our country today. The terrible Hitler and the nasty Stalin conspired against us, attacked us by surprise, and dismantled our

homeland. Then they started slaughtering us. However, we did not give up and fought heroically on land, in the air, and on the oceans until the fall of the Third Reich. We had the largest underground state, which launched the largest uprising in occupied Europe. We were heroic and steadfast. We did a great job! It simply couldn't have been better.

Of course, in the end, our treacherous allies betrayed us – but who could have predicted that?! – and, of course, those treacherous minorities. Jews, Ukrainians, and Belarusians stabbed us in the back by collaborating with the occupiers. Of course, we have nothing to reproach ourselves for. All our leaders were “great statesmen,” and all their decisions were “the only right ones,” and woe betide anyone who dares to have a different opinion.

A similar approach to our history is nothing new. Poles have always had a hard time accepting criticism of their own actions. Allow me to quote Karol Zbyszewski from the preface to his 1939 book *Niemcewicz od przodu i tyłu* (Niemcewicz from the Front and the Rear), which dealt with the fall of the First Polish Republic. The book brought a storm of criticism upon its author. "Some readers," wrote Zbyszewski, "may see in my book a lack of respect for religion, the military, the monarchy, the aristocracy, the Sejm, morality—well, for everything. I protest most vigorously. It is not in my nature to 'tarnish what is sacred'. But I cannot present the people who led Poland to its downfall in a favorable light. It is very convenient to blame all misfortunes on bad luck, fate, or the international situation – but this is not convincing. If a donkey dies, it may indeed be just bad luck, but when an entire country perishes, someone is to blame. Poland fell not because of Catherine and Prussia, but because of Poniatowski, the magnates, the bishops, and the nobility.

The book you are holding in your hands was born out of a deep opposition to Poles' uncritical treatment of their own history. In the face of repressing their own mistakes from their consciousness. Only if we learn from these mistakes will we be able to avoid them in the future.

Both the self-admiration bordering on hysteria and the strange masochistic pleasure that the Polish nation derives from celebrating its own defeats should have limits. The megalomaniacal and uncritical image of World War II presented above, which Poles still adhere to today, might make sense if we had won the war. However, it was our greatest defeat in history. The greatest catastrophe of our nation.

Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz, who is often quoted in this book, wrote: “In 1945, Poland found itself in the abyss of defeat. This was not only due to bad luck, but also as a result of our own mistakes, the misguided policies of our state leaders, and the misguided mood of society. We entered the war with Germany in 1939 on the basis of a military convention with France and a political agreement with England. France immediately failed to honor the convention. England broke the political agreement in Yalta in 1945. We can therefore wring our hands and claim that we were perfidiously deceived and abandoned by our allies, and this would be true. But what is called "reason of state" does not consist in lamenting ex post the perfidy of one's partners, but in the ability to predict whether the agreements proposed to us will be kept or not. And those who undertook to guide our fate were unable not only to predict politically, but also to think politically. Our children paid for their conceit and self-confidence with their blood, and the state with the loss of its independence.

In 1939, Poland played its greatest role in world history. Józef Beck's misguided decisions brought Hitler's first strike upon us, determined that we would find ourselves under Moscow's domination after the war, and saved the genocidal, totalitarian Soviet Union. Unfortunately, whether we like it or not, the only way to avoid all this was to ally ourselves in the first phase of the conflict with another terrible tyranny – the Third Reich.

The British and Americans gritted their teeth and allied themselves with Stalin during World War II because they understood that this dirty alliance was in their national interest. And no one can deny that today.

does not reproach. In 1939, the Poles should have gritted their teeth and allied themselves with Hitler for the same reason. As our "allies" have shown us, international politics is a brutal struggle for one's own interests, in which there is no room for morality, let alone "honor."

So let us repeat once again the main thesis of this book. Poland should have yielded to Hitler and joined forces with Germany to crush the Soviet Union. Then it should have waited patiently until Germany began to lose on the Western Front and changed alliances. It should have stabbed Germany in the back. Poland could only have emerged from World War II as an independent country if both of its neighbors – the Third Reich and the Soviet Union – had been defeated.

That is, as happened after World War I, which fortunately ended well for us. At that time, Germany first defeated Russia, and then the Western Allies defeated Germany. As a result, in 1918, after 120 years of captivity, the independent Republic of Poland was reborn like a phoenix from the ashes. If the German Empire had lost the war against the entire Anglo-French-Russian coalition at that time, we would probably not have regained our freedom to this day. Between 1939 and 1945, we should therefore have done everything in our power to repeat the scenario of the First World War. In one of his speeches in 1942, General Władysław Sikorski uttered a characteristic sentence that encapsulated Polish policy during World War II: "There is only one road to a liberated Poland, and it leads through a devastated Germany, to the liberation of Vilnius, Lviv, Warsaw, Krakow, and Gdynia." The prime minister was wrong. The road to the liberation of Warsaw, Krakow, and Gdynia did indeed lead through the destruction of Germany, but the road to the liberation of Vilnius and Lviv led through the destruction of the Soviet Union. Soviet.

When one of my editorial colleagues, journalist Piotr Zaremba, found out that I was writing this book, he asked me what my position was. From a Germanophile or anti-communist perspective? The answer is simple: I did not write this book from a Germanophile or anti-communist perspective. Nor did I write it from a left-wing or right-wing perspective. Nor did I write it from a pacifist, militaristic, anti-Semitic, pro-Semitic, pro-fascist, anti-fascist, or any other position.

I wrote it from a Polish perspective.

Bibliography

Memoirs, recollections
Anders W., *Without the Last Chapter. Memoirs from 1939–1946*, Warsaw 2010 Beck J., *When I Was Excellency*, Warsaw 1990
ibid., *Ostatni raport* [The Last Report], Warsaw 1987
Ibid., *Polska polityka zagraniczna w latach 1926–1932* [Polish Foreign Policy in the Years 1926–1932], Paris 1990 Belov N., *Byłem adiutantem Hitlera* [I Was Hitler's Adjutant], Warsaw 2003
Burckhardt C. J., *My Mission in Gdańsk 1937–1939*, Warsaw 1970 Churchill W., *The Second World War*, vol. 1, Gdańsk 1994
Ciano G., *Memoirs 1939–1943*, Bydgoszcz 1949 Czapski J., *On Inhuman Ground*, Warsaw 1990 Drymmer W. T., *In the Service of Poland*, Warsaw 1998 Eden A., *Memoirs*, vol. 2, Warsaw 1972
François-Poncet A., *I Was Ambassador in Berlin. September 1931–October 1938*, Warsaw 1968 Gafencu G., *The Last Days of Europe. A Diplomatic Journey in 1939*, Warsaw 1984
Gawroński J., *My Mission in Vienna 1932–1938*, Warsaw 1965 Giedroyc J., *Autobiography for Four Hands*, Warsaw 1996
Goetel F., *Years of War Under Occupation. War and Warsaw*, Wiadomości No. 203, London, February 19, 1950
Herwarth H., *Between Hitler and Stalin*, Warsaw, 1992
Hitler A., *Mein Kampf*, Krakow 1992
Ibid., *Table Talk 1941–1944*, Warsaw 1996
Kraczkiewicz K., *Autumn 1938–Autumn 1939 (The Escalation of the Polish-German Conflict)*, Zeszyty Historyczne, no. 70, Paris, 1977
Kwiatkowski, E., *Diary of the Minister of the Treasury*, Historical Notebooks, No. 96, Paris, 1991 Ibid., *In Such a World We Lived*, Krakow, 1990
Laroche J., *Poland 1926–1935. Memoirs of the French Ambassador*, Warsaw 1966 Lipski J., *Diplomat in Berlin 1933–1939*, New York–London 1968
Łukasiewicz J., *Dyplomata w Paryżu 1936–1939. Wspomnienia i dokumenty Juliusza Łukasiewicza, ambasadora Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* [Diplomat in Paris 1936–1939. Memoirs and Documents of Juliusz Łukasiewicz, Ambassador of the Republic of Poland], London 1989
Meysztowicz J., *Past tense. Memories of service in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1932–1939*, Krakow 1984
Mitkiewicz L., *Memories of Kaunas 1938–1939*, Warsaw 1990
Mühlstein A., *Diary. September 1939–November 1940*, Warsaw 1999 Noël L., *German Aggression Against Poland*, Warsaw 1966
Official documents concerning Polish-German and Polish-Soviet relations 1933–1939, New York [no publisher] Pobóg-Malinowski W., *At the Romanian Crossroads*, Warsaw 1990
Before September and after September. From the memoirs of young diplomats of the Second Polish Republic, Warsaw 1998 Raczyński E., *In allied London*, Warsaw 1989
Rauschning H., *The Revolution of Nihilism*, Warsaw 1996
Ibid., *Conversations with Hitler*, Warsaw 1994
Schmitzek S., *Roads and wildernesses of a bygone era. Memories from years of work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1920–1939*, Warsaw 1976 Sokolnicki M., *Ankara Diary 1939–1943*, London 1965
Ibid., *At the Crossroads of Time*, Kultura, 1/2, Paris, 1957
Sosnkowski K., *Diary. March–September 1939*, Niepodległość, vol. 16, 1982
The perpetrators of the September defeat before the court of history. Documents of the research commissions of the Polish authorities in exile, Warsaw 2005
Stachiewicz S., *Remaining faithful to soldierly duty*, Warsaw 1998
Starzeński P., *Three years with Beck*, London 1972
Studnicki W., *Tragic mistakes. Attempts to counteract national catastrophes 1939–1945*, [in:] W. Studnicki, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, Toruń 2001
Studnicki-Gizbert K., *Reflections from Wandering Around the World*, Toruń 1998 Swianiewicz S., *In the Shadow of Katyn*, Warsaw 1990
Szembek J., *Diary. September–December 1939*, Warsaw 1989 ibid., *Diary and Files*, vols. 1–4, London 1964–1972
Szymański A., *The Bad Neighbor. Germany 1932–1939 as Seen by the Polish Military Attaché in Berlin*, London [no date] Świtalski K., *Diary 1919–1935*, Warsaw 1992
Wańkowicz M., *Through Four Climates 1912–1972*, Warsaw 1972

September 1939. In the accounts of diplomats: Józef Beck, Jan Szembek, Anthony Drexel-Biddle, Leon Noël, and others, Warsaw 1989
Wysocki A., *Secrets of the Diplomatic Safe*, Warsaw 1979 Zabiełło S.,
On Duty in France, Warsaw 1971
ibid., *On Government and Borders*, Warsaw 1986

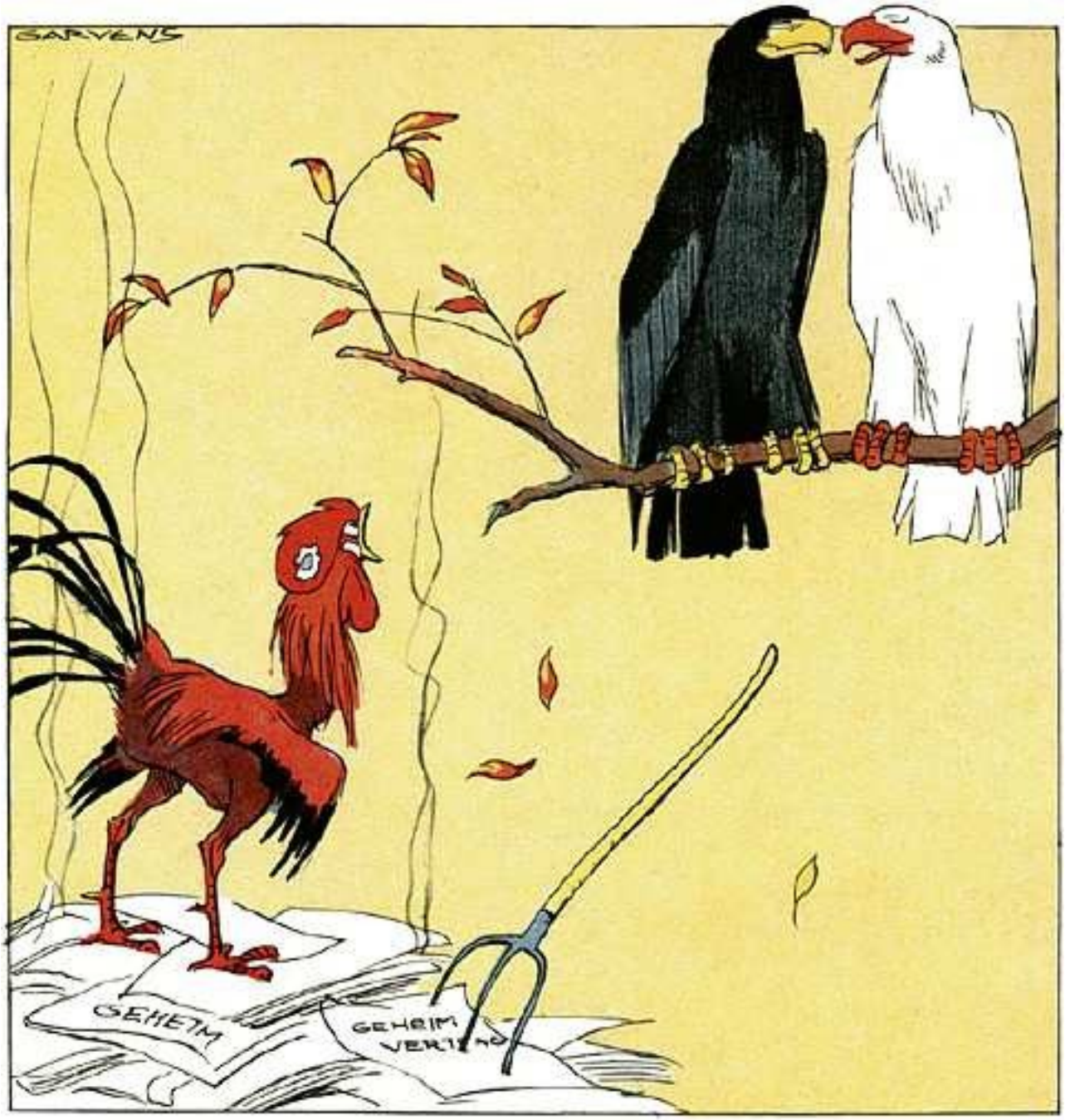
Articles, journalism, important studies

September 17. Materials from the national conference of historians, Krakow, *October 25–26*, *1993*, Krakow, 1994 Bajko P., *Hermann Goering: The Białowieża Forest was a place where he hunted*, www.poranny.pl
Baliszewski, D., *The Third Side of the Coin*, Wrocław, 2010
Batowski, H., *Europe Heads Toward the Abyss*, Poznań, 1977
ibid., *The Agony of Peace and the Beginning of War. August–September 1939*, Poznań
1984 ibid., *The Diplomatic Crisis in Europe. Autumn 1938–Spring 1939*, Warsaw 1962
Bloch M., *Ribbentrop*, Warsaw 1995
Bocheński A., *Between Germany and Russia*, Warsaw 1996 Borejsza
J. W., *Adolf Hitler's Anti-Slavism*, Warsaw 1988
Broszat M., *The National Socialist Policy on Poland 1939–1945*, Warsaw–Poznań 1966
Cenckiewicz, S., *Correspondence between Władysław Studnicki, Wacław Jędrzejewicz, and Henryk Kogut from 1945–1948*, part 2, [in:] Arcana, no. 3–4, Krakow, 2003
ibid., *Tadeusz Katelbach. Political biography 1897–1977*, Warsaw 2005
Ciałowicz J., *Polish-French military alliance 1921–1939*, Warsaw 1970 Creveld
M. van, *The changing face of war. From Marne to Iraq*, Poznań 2008
Czapiewski, E., *Polish Conservatives and Hitlerism (1930–1934)*, [in:] Sobótka, No. 2/1984
Dach, K., Dubicki, T., *Marshal Ion Antonescu*, Łódź 2003
Polish-German Declaration on Non-Violence, Toruń 2005
Deszczyński M., *The Last Exam. The Polish Army and the Czechoslovak Crisis 1938–1939*, Warsaw 2003 Dębski S., *Between Berlin and Moscow. German-Soviet Relations 1939–1941*, Warsaw 2003
Drewniak B., *Polish-German Rapprochement in the Sphere of Culture 1919–1939*, Gdańsk 2005
ibid., *Gdańsk Pomerania and the problem of the so-called corridor in Polish and German historiography and journalism*, Gdańsk 1991 Górski G., *September 1939. Alternative considerations*, Warsaw 2000
Grünberg K., Serczyk J., *The Fourth Partition of Poland. From the history of German-Soviet relations in the interwar period*, Warsaw 1990
Grzelak C. K., *Stalin's Army 1939–1941. The Armed Arm of the USSR's Policy of Force*, Warsaw
2010 Ibid., *September 1939 on the Borderlands in Reports*, Warsaw 1999
Guz E., *Goebbels on Poland and the Allied USSR*, Warsaw 1999 ibid.,
Riddles and mysteries of the September campaign, Warsaw 2011
Gzella J., *Between the Soviets and the Germans. Concepts of Polish foreign policy of Vilnius conservatives grouped around "Słowo" (1922–1939)*, Toruń 2011
Ibid., *The Political Thought of Władysław Studnicki against the Background of Polish Conservative Concepts*, Toruń 1993
Ibid., *Poland's partitioners and neighbors in the socio-political thought of Władysław Studnicki (until 1939)*, Toruń 1998
Irving D., *Hitler's War*, Warsaw 2005
Jäckel E., *Hitler's View of the World*, Warsaw 1973
Jakubowski Z., *The Political Thought of Germanophiles*, Poznań 1970 [doctoral thesis, typescript]
Jaruzelski J., *Mackiewicz and the Conservatives*, Warsaw 1976
ibid., *Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz 1896–1966. Vilnius–London–Warsaw*, Warsaw 1987
The Polish Campaign of 1939. Military and Political Aspects from the Perspective of Seventy Years, edited by J. Kirszak and D. Kores, Wrocław 2011
Kershaw I., *Hitler 1936–1941. Nemesis*, Poznań 2008
Kornat M., *The Polish School of Sovietology 1930–1939*, Krakow 2003 ibid.,
Poland and the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact, Warsaw 2002
Kosicka-Pajewska A., *Poland between Russia and Germany. The Political Concepts of Adolf Bocheński*, Poznań 1992 Kowalczuk P., *The Duce Up Close*, "Uważam Rze Historia," no. 1/2012
Kozłowski M., *The Case of Prime Minister Leon Kozłowski*, Warsaw 2005
Krasuski J., *Polish-German Relations 1919–1932*, Poznań 1975 idem,
Polish-German Relations 1871–1939, Warsaw 1967
King E. C., *Poland and Poles in National Socialist Propaganda in Germany*, *1919–1945*, Warsaw [no date]
The Crisis of 1939 in the Interpretations of Polish and Russian Historians, Warsaw 2009 Lapter
K., *The Piłsudski–Hitler Pact*, Warsaw 1962
Lenczyk M., *Poland and its Neighbors. Military Relations 1921–1939*, Białystok
1997 Lepecki M., *Memoirs of Marshal Piłsudski's Aide-de-Camp*, Warsaw 1987
Łojek J., *The Aggression of September 17*, *1939*, Warsaw 1990
ibid., *On Disputes and Polemics. Historical Journalism*, Lublin 1991

Łubieński T., *1939. It began in September*, Warsaw 2009
Łukomski G., *The problem of the "corridor" in Polish-German relations and on the international stage*, *1919–1939*, Warsaw 2000
Mackiewicz J., *No Need to Speak Loudly*, London 1993
ibid., *Dear Madam...*, London 1998
Ibid., *Optimism cannot replace Poland*, London 2005
Ibid., *The victory of provocation*, London 1997
Mackiewicz, S., *History of Poland from November 11, 1918*, *to July 5, 1945*, London [no date].
Ibid., *The Key to Piłsudski*, Warsaw, 1984 [underground edition].
Ibid., *At Eleven O'Clock, Says the Actor, the Play is Over*, Warsaw 1986 [underground publication]
Ibid., *Beck's Politics*, Krakow [no date]
Ibid., *Impressions from the lecture*, Wiadomości, London, July 22, 1951
Malak E., *Prototypes of combat aircraft and aircraft factories. Poland 1930–1939*, Warsaw 2011
Materski W., *On the run. The Second Polish Republic and the Soviets 1918–1943*, Warsaw 2005
Micewski A., *In the shadow of Marshal Piłsudski*, Warsaw 1969
ibid., *From the Political Geography of the Second Polish Republic*, Warsaw
1964 Moczulski L., *The Polish War of 1939*, Warsaw 2009
Musiał B., *Stalin's War*, Poznań 2012
Ibid., *To the West Over Poland's Dead Body*, Warsaw 2009
Nagorski A., *The Greatest Battle. Moscow 1941–1942*, Poznań 2008
Niewieżyn W. A., *Stalin's Secret Plans. Soviet Propaganda Before the War with the Third Reich*, *1939–1941*, Krakow 2000 Nikonov A., *Strike First!*, Warsaw 2011
Okulicz K., *Did Beck Really Want to Change Polish Policy in August 1939?*, [in:] "Zeszyty Historyczne" [Historical Notebooks], no. 42, Paris 1977
the same [under the pseudonym Krzysztof Oksza], *Józef Beck's Hour of Trial*, Wiadomości, no. 12 (51), London 1947
Osica J., Sowa A., *What If... Alternative Histories*, Warsaw 1998
Pawłowski, T., *Marshal Śmigły's Army*, Warsaw, 2009
ibid., *Aviation in the 1930s in Poland and around the world*, Warsaw 2011
Ibid., *Attention! Tanks! Preparations for anti-tank defense in the Polish Army in the 1930s*, Toruń 2006
Pobóg-Malinowski W., *The Recent Political History of Poland 1914–1939*, Gdańsk 1990
Pruszyński K., *The Book of Grim Understatements*, Warsaw 1957
Pruszyński M., *The Secret of Piłsudski*, Warsaw 1997
Raack R. C., *Poland and Europe in Stalin's Plans*, Warsaw 1997 Raina
P., *Polish-German Relations 1937–1939*, London 1975
Rotfeld D., Bartoszewski W., Zalewski P., *The Man Who Spoke of Honor*, Rzeczpospolita, May 5, 2009 Serwatka T., *Józef Piłsudski and Germany*, Wrocław 1997
Siemaszko Z. S., *Poles and Poland in World War II*, Lublin 2010 Skwieciński P., *A Hair's Breadth from Collapse*, Uważam Rze, October 31, 2011 Ibid., *Stalin Would Not Have Waited...*, Uważam Rze, May 22, 2011
Snyder T., *Bloodlands*: *Europe Between Hitler* and *Stalin*, Part 2, Uważam Rze Historia, No. 2/2012 Ibid., *Bloodlands*, Warsaw 2011
Sobczak J., *Polska w propagandzie i polityce III Rzeszy* [Poland in the Propaganda and Politics of the Third Reich], Poznań 1988 Sowa A. L., *U progu wojny* [On the Eve of War], Kraków 1997
Strzałka K., *Between Friendship and Enmity. From the History of Polish-Italian Relations (1939–1945)*, Krakow 2001
A Study of Poland's Strategic Plan Against Germany by Kutrzeba and Mossor, Warsaw 1987 Studnicki W., *The Question of Czechoslovakia and Poland's Reason of State*, Warsaw 1938
ibid., *Europe's Political System and Poland*, [in:] Studnicki W., *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, Toruń 2002
Ibid., *Facing the Coming Second World War*, [in:] Studnicki W., *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, Toruń 2002 Ibid., *People, Ideas*, *and Actions*, [in:] Studnicki W., *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, Toruń 2001
Ibid., *Soviet Russia in World Politics*, Vilnius 1932 Suvorov V., *Icebreaker*, Warsaw 1992
Tebinka J., *British Policy Towards the Problem of Polish-Soviet Relations 1939–1945*, Warsaw 1998 Terlecki O., *Colonel Beck*, Krakow 1985
Ujazdowski K. M., *The Vitality of Conservatism. The Political Ideas of Adolf Bocheński*, Warsaw 2005 Wachowiak S., *War and Occupation 1939–1945*, Historical Notebooks, No. 77, Paris 1986
Wandycz P., *Marshal Piłsudski's Attempt to Establish Contact with Hitler in the Autumn of 1930*, Niepodległość, vol. 11, 1978
Ibid., *With Piłsudski and Sikorski. August Zaleski, Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1926–1932 and 1939–1941*, Warsaw 1999
Weinstein J., *Studnicki in the light of Nazi documents from World War II*, [in:] "Zeszyty Historyczne" No. 11, Paris 1967

Wieczorkiewicz P., *Foreign Policy of the Second Polish Republic Against the Background of the European Situation in 1918–1939*, Warsaw 1982
ibid., *The Last Years of Independent Poland*, Warsaw 1991 ibid.,
The Tuchaczewski Affair, Warsaw 1994
ibid., *Chain of Death: The Purge in the Red Army 1937–1939*, Warsaw 2001 ibid., *The Campaign of 1939*, Warsaw 2001
ibid., *Political History of Poland 1935–1945*, Warsaw 2005 Wielowieyski A.,
At the Crossroads of History, Warsaw 2012 Wojciechowski M., *Polish-German Relations 1933–1938*, Poznań 1980
Wojewódzki I., *Kazimierz Sosnkowski during World War II*, Warsaw 2009
Woźny A., *German Preparations for War with Poland in the Assessments of Polish Military Leaders in 1932–1939*, Warsaw 2000
Military Intelligence and Counterintelligence of the Second Polish Republic, vol. 2, edited by Tadeusz Dubicki, Łomianki 2012 Zbyszewski K., *Niemcewicz from the Front and Rear*, Warsaw 1991
Ziemkiewicz R., *Quiet, please*, *over Beck's coffin!* www.rp.pl ibid.,
Not this war, Rzeczpospolita, August 27, 2011
Zychowicz P., *Germanophile. Władysław Studnicki 1939–1945* [biography in preparation]
ibid., *Let's rewrite Polish history*, interview with Prof. Paweł Wieczorkiewicz, parts 1 and 2, Rzeczpospolita, March 27, 2009
Ibid., *Ribbentrop–Beck Pact*, "Uważam Rze," December 18, 2011
Ibid., *Poland had a choice*, www.rp.pl, May 19, 2009
Ibid., *Germanophile circles in the General Government 1939–1942. The case of Władysław Studnicki*, Warsaw 2005 [master's thesis, typescript]
Ibid., *The Polish War*, conversation with Prof. Paweł Wieczorkiewicz, Rzeczpospolita, September 17, 2005
Żerko S., *Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz on Polish-German relations (until 1939)*, [in:] A. Czubiński [ed.], *Poles and Germans. Ten centuries of neighborliness*, Warsaw 1987
Ibid., *Polish-German Relations 1938–1939*, Poznań 1998
Ibid., *Hitler's Dream Alliance. Great Britain in National Socialist Concepts and in the Politics of the Third Reich until 1939*, Poznań 1995
Żochowski S., *British Policy Toward Poland 1916–1948*, Lublin 1994

Deutsch-polnischer Nichtangriffspakt



oder gallisches Gallenleiden

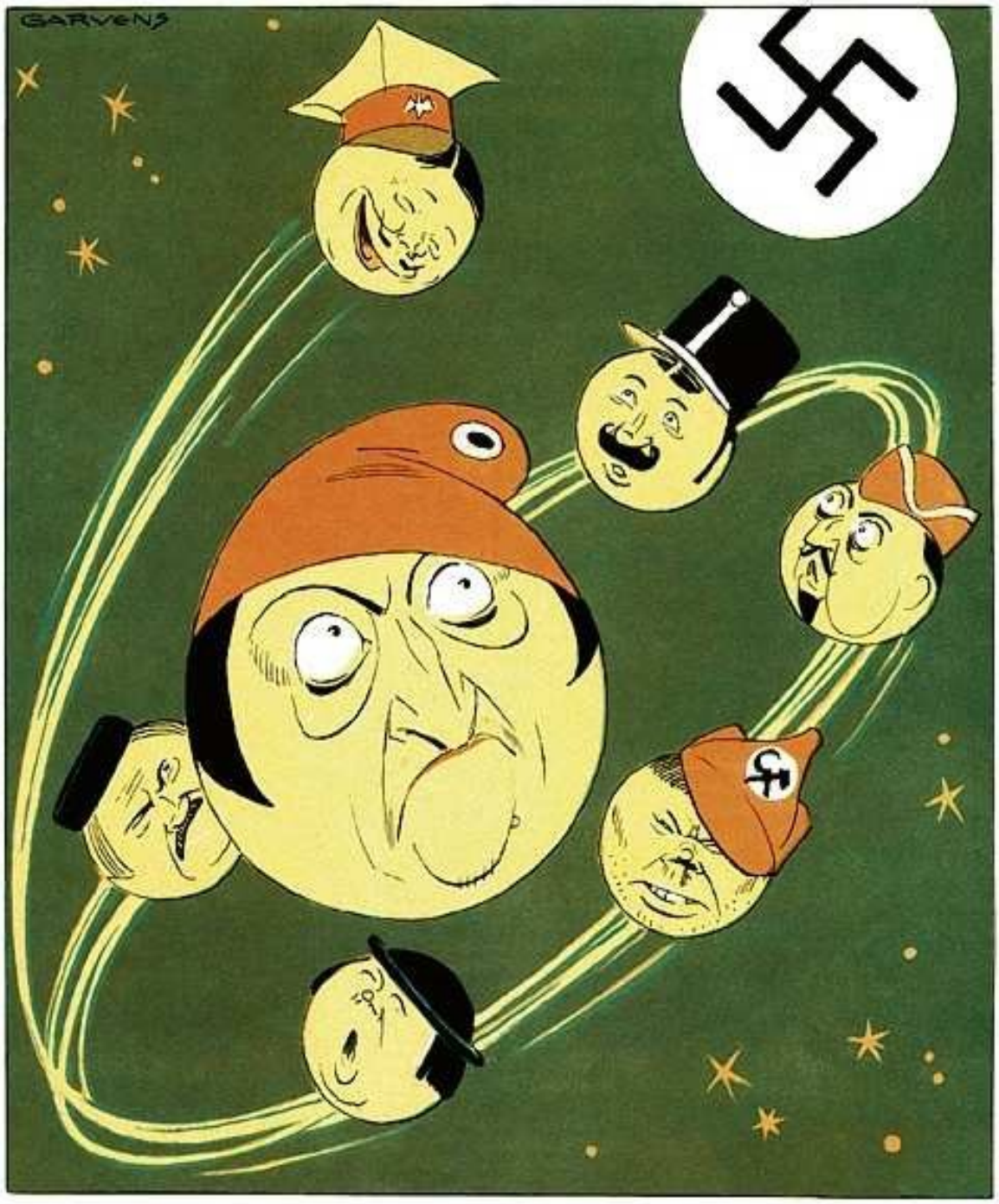
Caricature from the leading German satirical magazine Kladderadatsch, December 10, 1933. There was still a month and a half to go before the agreement between Warsaw and Berlin was signed, but détente was already a fact.
Caption at the top: "German-Polish non-aggression pact," at the bottom: "or Gallic bile."

© Institut für Zeitungsforschung Eigenbetrieb der Stadt Dortmund

Nr. 41 — 87. Jahrg.
Berlin, 14. Oktober 1934

Preis 52 Pfg.

Kladderadatsch



Am politischen Sternenhimmel wurde eine eigenartige Erscheinung beobachtet. Einer der Trabanten, die um den Planeten Frankreich kreisen, geriet aus der Bahn, sichtlich angezogen durch den seit 1933 erschienenen Fixstern Deutschland.

"An unusual phenomenon has been observed in the political constellation. One of the satellites of the planet France has fallen out of orbit. It is likely that in 1933 it was attracted by a new powerful star – Germany." "Kladderadatsch," October 14, 1934.

© Institut für Zeitungsforschung Eigenbetrieb der Stadt Dortmund

Die lateinischen Schwestern

„Sehen sie sich nicht täuschend ähnlich?"
„Ja, man kann sich in beiden täuschen!"

"Latin sisters." A Polish and German officer, looking at the personifications of France and Italy: "Look at them, aren't they deceptively similar?" "Yes, you can get burned by both of them." The caricature was created before Italy finally allied itself with Germany. "Kladderadatsch," November 18, 1934.

© Institut für Zeitungsforschung Eigenbetrieb der Stadt Dortmund

Jagd in Polen

(Ministerpräsident Göring nahm als Gast an den polnischen Jagden teil.)

„Adler stehen unter Naturschutz,
Böcke mögen andere schießen,
halten wir uns an die Wölfe —"

"Hunting in Poland (Prime Minister Pruss took part in a Polish hunt)." Caption: "Eagles are protected, let others shoot deer, and we will lie in wait for wolves..." Kladderadatsch, February 17, 1935.

© Institut für Zeitungsforschung Eigenbetrieb der Stadt Dortmund

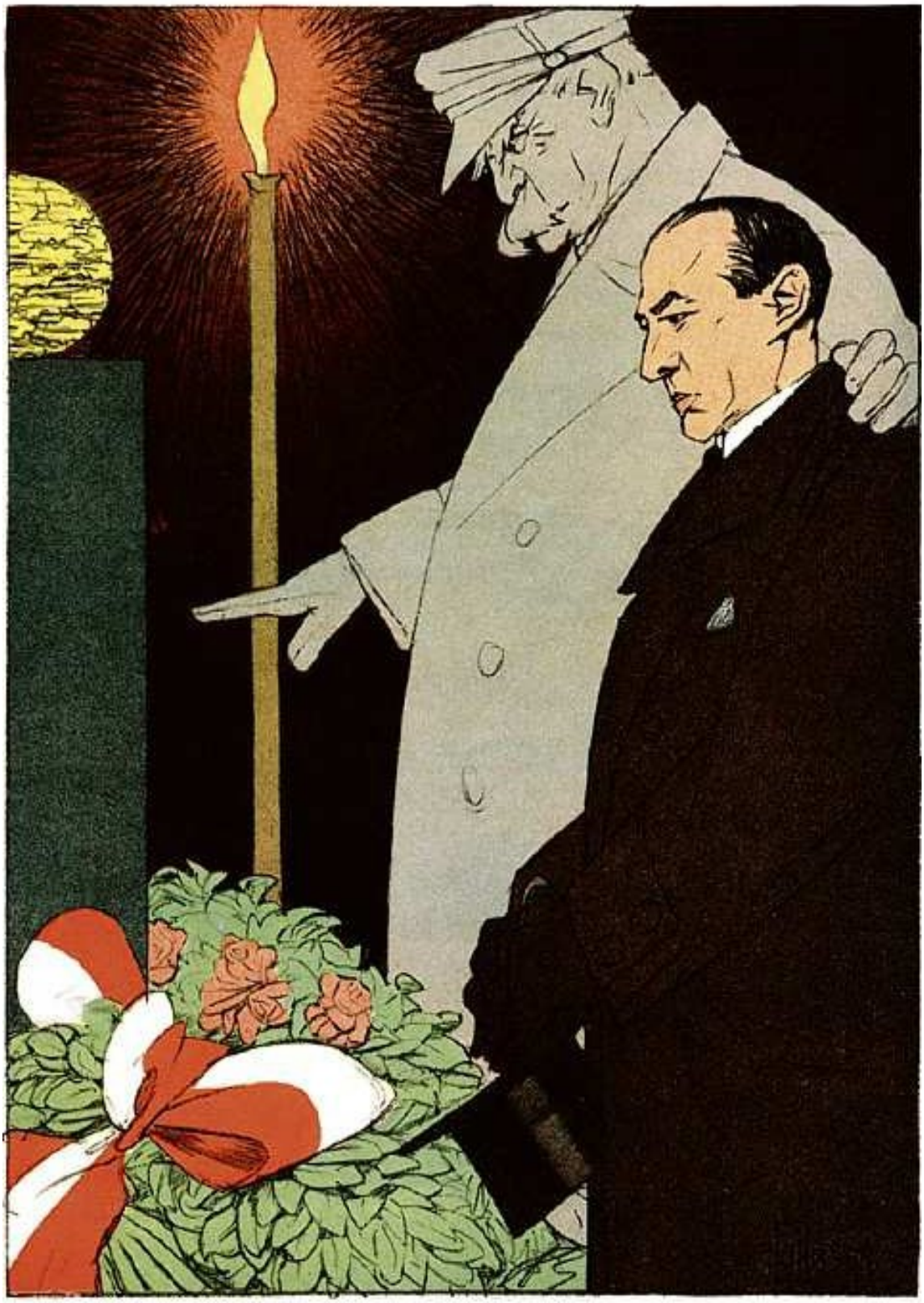
Marschall Pilsudski †

Der Friede: „Dein Wandel, mein Paladin, hat mir die Tür geöffnet!"

"Marshal Piłsudski †." Caption at the bottom: "Peace: Your transformation, my paladin, has opened the door for me."
Kladderadatsch, May 26, 1935.

© Institut für Zeitungsforschung Eigenbetrieb der Stadt Dortmund

Polnischer Besuch



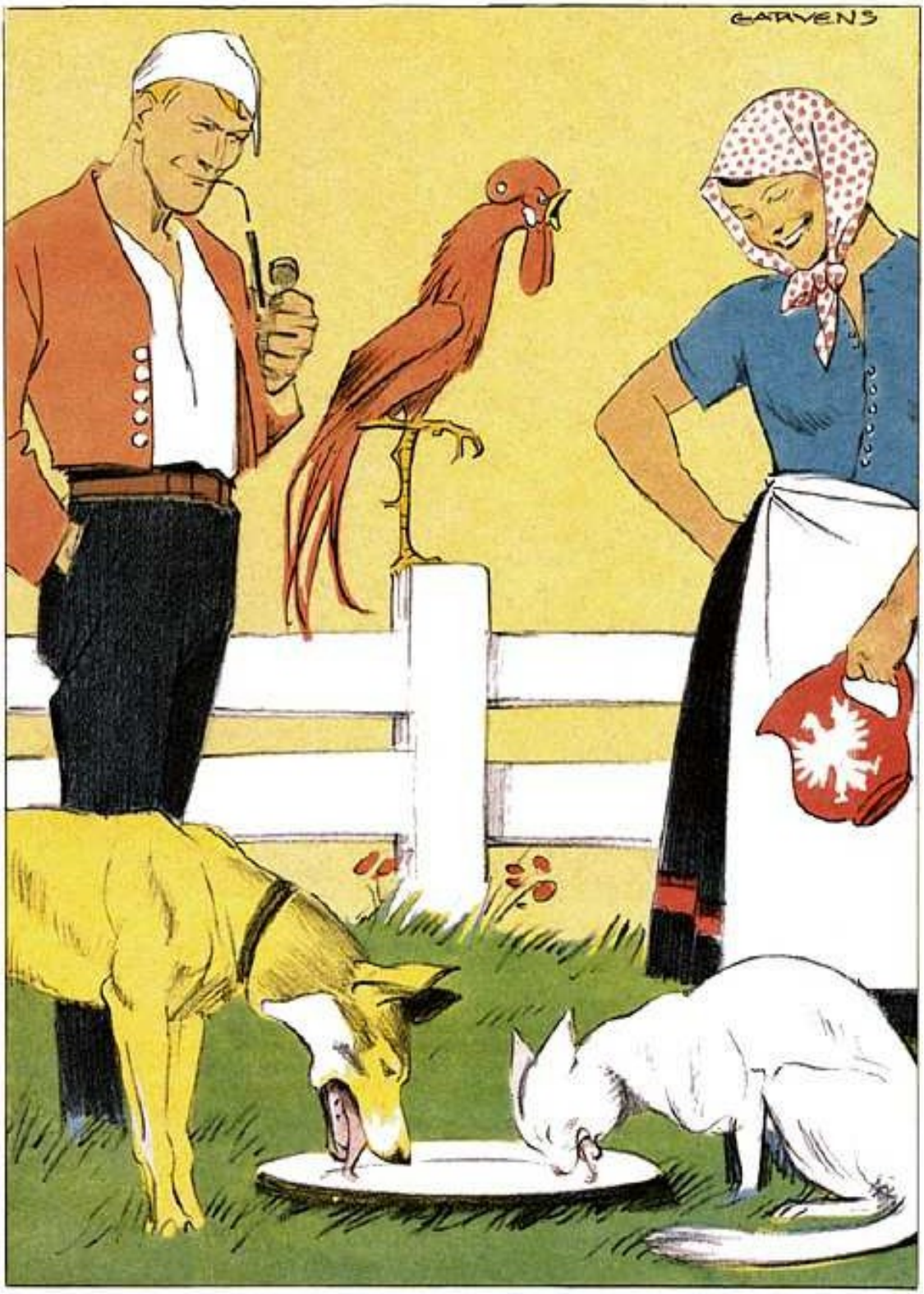
„Sie fielen auch für uns!"

"Polish visit." Drawing commemorating the visit of Foreign Minister Józef Beck to Berlin and his laying of a wreath at the monument to German soldiers who died during World War I. "They also died for us" reads the inscription at the bottom. Kladderadatsch, July 21, 1935.

© Institut für Zeitungsforschung Eigenbetrieb der Stadt Dortmund

Überwundene Vorurteile

(Das gute deutsch-polnische Einvernehmen wird von einem Teil der französischen Presse immer noch angezweifelt)



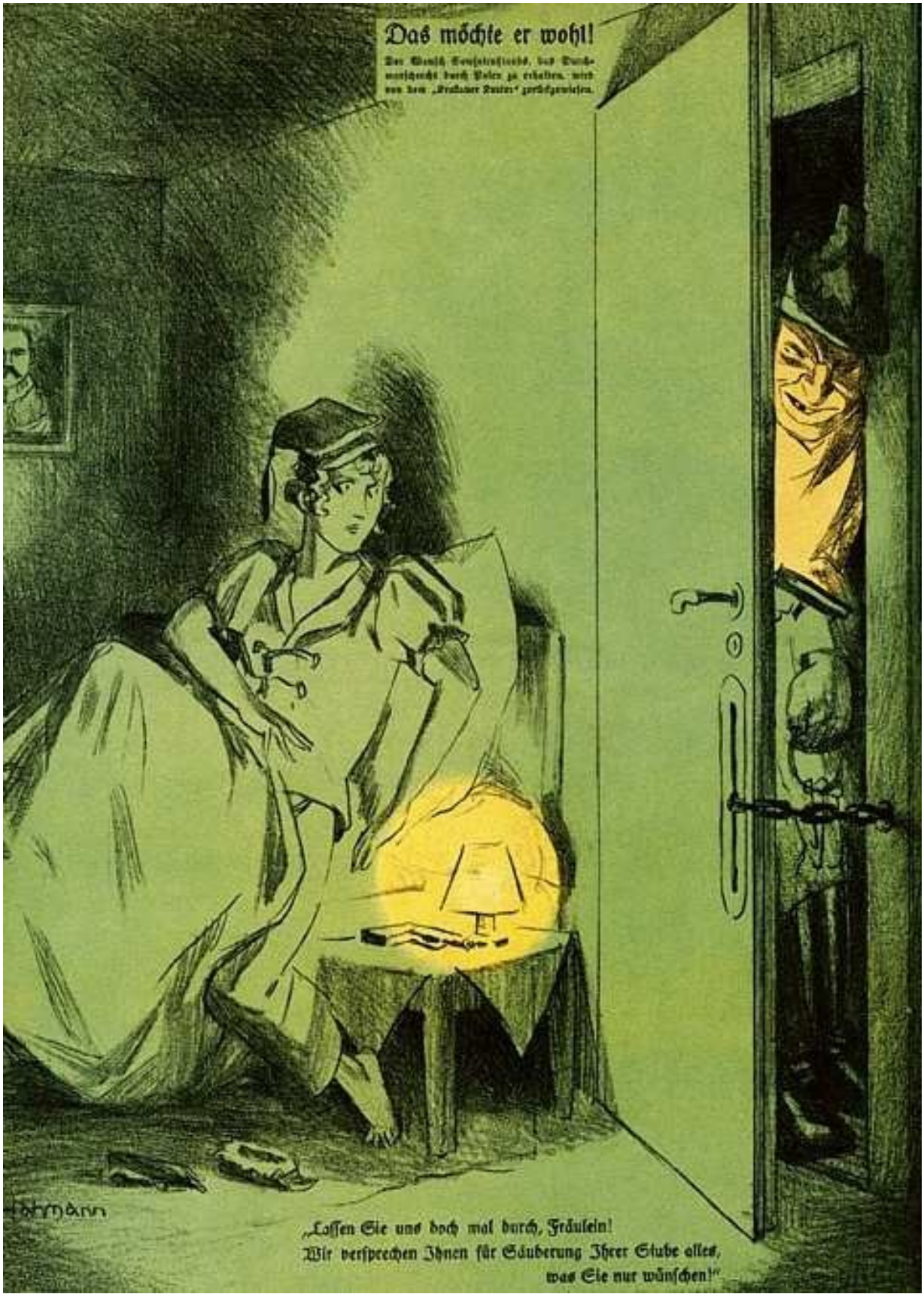
„Siehst du, Marinka, die lassen sich auch nicht durch das Geschrei des Gockels stören!"

"Prejudices overcome (Part of the French press still questions good German-Polish relations)." Michel, symbolizing Germany, says to a Polish girl: "You see, Marinko, they don't even mind the rooster crowing!" "Kladderadatsch," July 28, 1935.

© Institut für Zeitungsforschung Eigenbetrieb der Stadt Dortmund

"Gdańsk crunchy almonds." The document that the German man hands to the Polish girl bears the inscription "German-Polish Agreement." The man says: "Good morning, my beloved." Kladderadatsch, November 29, 1936.

© Institut für Zeitungsforschung Eigenbetrieb der Stadt Dortmund



"That's what he really wanted! Kurier Krakowski rejected Soviet Russia's request that Poland grant it the right to march through its territory." "Let us through, miss. We promise that we will do whatever you want to clean up your room," says the Bolshevik pushing through the door. Above the bed of the Polish girl reaching for a pistol, there is a portrait of Józef Piłsudski. Kladderadatsch, July 10, 1938.

© Institut für Zeitungsforschung Eigenbetrieb der Stadt Dortmund

Es bubelt der Dubler, es tanzet der Bär,
es hüpfet das Mädchen, der Teller bleibt leer!

"Street circus for kids." Caption at the bottom: "Dudli plays the bagpipes, the bear dances, the girl jumps around, and the tray is still empty!" The inscription on the tray reads: "Anti-German declaration." As can be seen, the figures representing the nations of Central and Eastern Europe are quite indifferent, with only the Pole preparing to jump. More than a week has passed since the signing of the Beck–Halifax Pact. "Kladderadatsch," April 16, 1939.

© Institut für Zeitungsforschung Eigenbetrieb der Stadt Dortmund

Die gute alte Tante

„Hier, Kleiner, spiel mal mit dem neuen Ball drüben am Haus des Nachbarn!"

"Good old auntie." "Here you go, kid, play with your new ball in front of the neighbors' house." The bomb bears the inscription "English-Polish Pact." A complete reversal in the Third Reich press's portrayal of Poland. Once again, our country is symbolized by a ragged dwarf. Kladderadatsch, May 28, 1939.

© Institut für Zeitungsforschung Eigenbetrieb der Stadt Dortmund

Der Geist Pilsudskis

Pilsudski schlug im August 1920 Sowjetrußland bei Warschau.

„Bei der Politik hätte ich die Schlacht bei Warschau niemals schlagen können!"

"The spirit of Piłsudski. In August 1920, Piłsudski defeated Soviet Russia near Warsaw." The Marshal to Beck, who had just signed an agreement with the British: "With *such a* policy, I would never have won the Battle of Warsaw."
"Kladderadatsch," June 11, 1939.

© Institut für Zeitungsforschung Eigenbetrieb der Stadt Dortmund

„Nur keine Angst! Ich bin die von England versprochene Sowjethilfe!"

"Don't worry!" says the Bolshevik climbing into the Polish garden behind the owner's back. "I am the Soviet aid promised by the British." A clear warning against the possibility of another partition of Poland. Kladderadatsch, June 18, 1939.

© Institute for Newspaper Research, an independent municipal enterprise of the City of Dortmund

Auf falschem Kurs

"On the wrong course." Kladderadatsch, July 9, 1939.

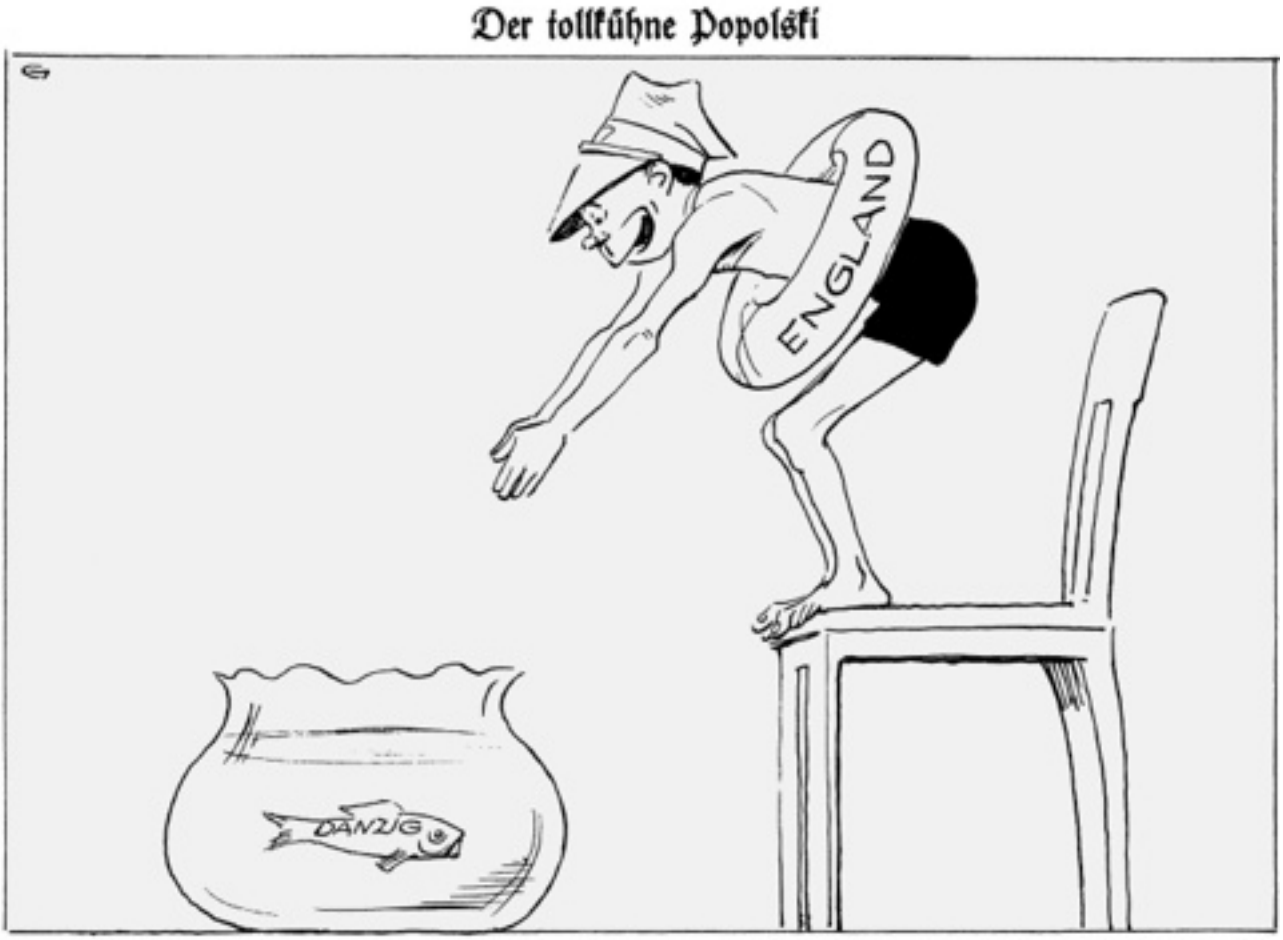
© Institute for Newspaper Research, Dortmund City Council

"Death merchant." The figure behind the counter is, of course, Great Britain. "How many Polish bones is one English pound worth?" reads the caption at the bottom. Kladderadatsch, July 30, 1939.

© Institute for Newspaper Research, Municipal Enterprise of the City of Dortmund

This is how Poland was portrayed in Kladderadatsch on March 2, 1934 ("Polish-German trade agreement. Let us eat our fill together!")...

© Institut für Zeitungsforschung Eigenbetrieb der Stadt Dortmund



...and on August 20, 1939: "The daring Popolski." "With this lifeline, nothing can happen to me."

© Institut für Zeitungsforschung Eigenbetrieb der Stadt Dortmund

Józef Beck believed that he was carrying out Józef Piłsudski's political will. In reality, he betrayed it... The photo shows the two men during Independence Day celebrations. Warsaw, November 11, 1929.

© National Digital Archives

Józef Piłsudski had a terrible knack for choosing his successors... Edward Śmigły-Rydz with German military attaché Colonel Bogislav von Studnitz during Independence Day celebrations. Warsaw, November 11, 1938.

© National Digital Archives

Memorial service for Józef Piłsudski at Wawel Cathedral. Aleksandra Piłsudska is seated in an armchair, with Hermann Göring in the front row. Krakow, May 18, 1935.
© National Digital Archives

Funeral procession on Krakowskie Przedmieście Street. Hermann Göring shuffles behind Józef Piłsudski's coffin. Warsaw, May 15, 1935.
© National Digital Archives

At the same time, ceremonies related to the Marshal's death took place in the Reich. Adolf Hitler (with his back turned) enters St. Hedwig's Church. Berlin, May 18, 1935.
© National Digital Archives

Stairs of St. Hedwig's Church. Berlin, May 18, 1935.
© National Digital Archives

Memorial service for Józef Piłsudski. All leading dignitaries of the Third Reich in attendance. Berlin, May 18, 1935.
© National Digital Archives

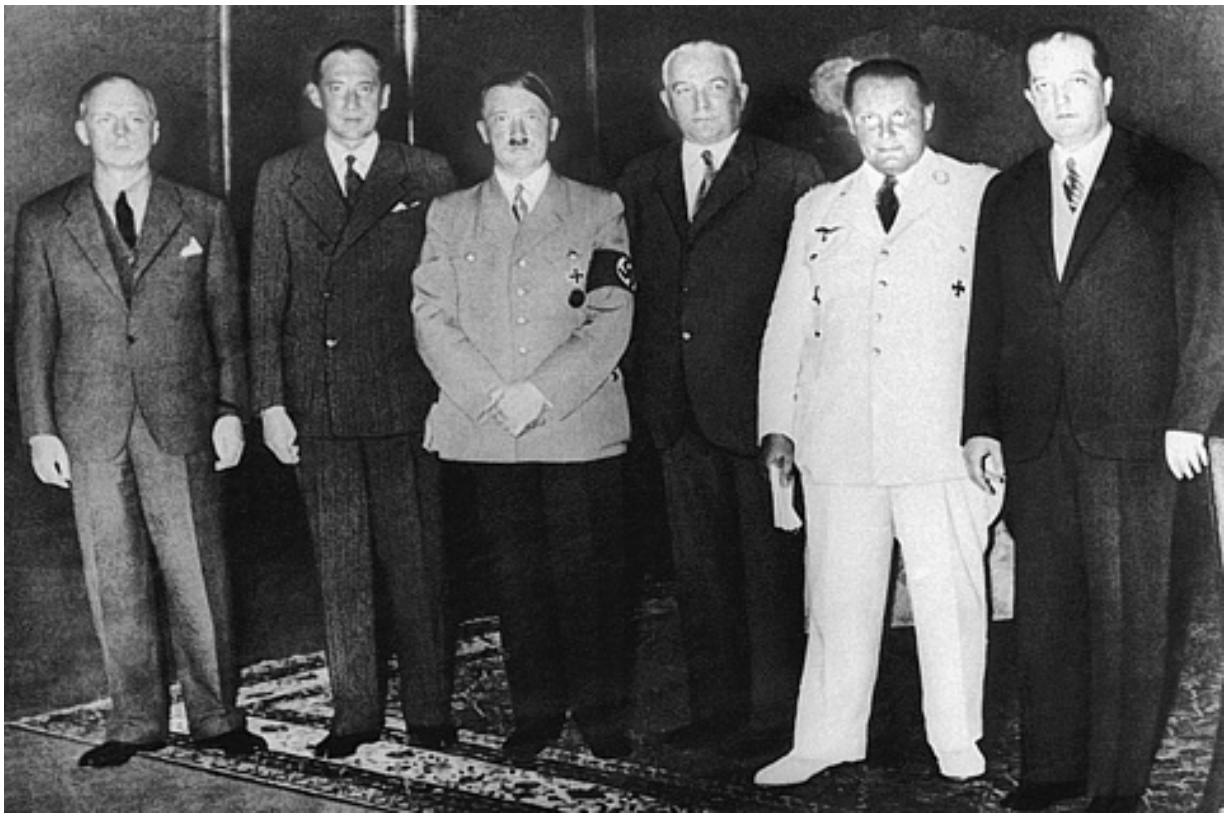
As Pola Negri, who was present in the church, recalled, Hitler was clearly moved during the ceremony. Berlin, May 18, 1935.
© National Digital Archives

Joseph Goebbels, who hated Poles, turned into a Polonophile in 1934 after signing an agreement with Poland. Visiting Wawel Castle, with Jan Szembek, deputy head of Polish diplomacy, on the left. Krakow, June 15, 1934.
© National Digital Archives

Before his departure for the Reich. Joseph Goebbels seems delighted with Polish hospitality. Krakow, June 16, 1934.

© National Digital Archives

Germans traveled to Poland, and Poles traveled to Germany. Adolf Hitler and Józef Beck at the Reich Chancellery. Berlin, July 3, 1935.
© EAST NEWS/AKG



Joachim von Ribbentrop, Józef Beck, Adolf Hitler, Konstantin von Neurath, Hermann Göring, Józef Lipski. Berlin, July 3, 1935.
© National Digital Archives

Józef Beck with Reich Minister of War Werner von Blomberg and Commander-in-Chief of the Army General Werner von Fritsche in front of an honor guard on Unter den Linden. Berlin, July 1935.

© National Digital Archives

Józef Beck with von Blomberg and von Fritsche at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Berlin. July 1935.

© National Digital Archives

The Germans were enamored with Jan Kiepura. The Polish singer's performance was applauded by Goebbels, Göring, and other dignitaries of the Reich. Berlin, February 25, 1935.

© National Digital Archives

After his performance, Kiepura receives congratulations from Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels. Berlin, February 25, 1935.

© National Digital Archives

The armed forces of both countries also maintained close contacts. Visit of Polish officers to Berlin. On the right, General Tadeusz Kutrzeba. May 1935.

© National Digital Archives

Visit of the destroyers *Burza* and *Wicher* to Germany. General Tadeusz Kutrzeba in front of a unit of the German Navy during an inspection on the battleship *Deutschland*. Cologne, July 1935.
© National Digital Archives

German and Polish officers in front of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Warsaw, April 17, 1938.
© National Digital Archives

Wehrmacht officers visit a training ground at the Infantry Training Center. A camouflaged heavy machine gun emplacement. Rembertów, January 1938.
© National Digital Archives

However, it was Herman Göring who visited Poland most often, having been tasked by Hitler with winning over the Poles. With President Ignacy Mościcki. Białowieża Forest, February 1938.
© National Digital Archives

The Third Reich's chief huntsman with Polish trophies. For now, they are still animals. Białowieża Forest, February 1938.
© National Digital Archives

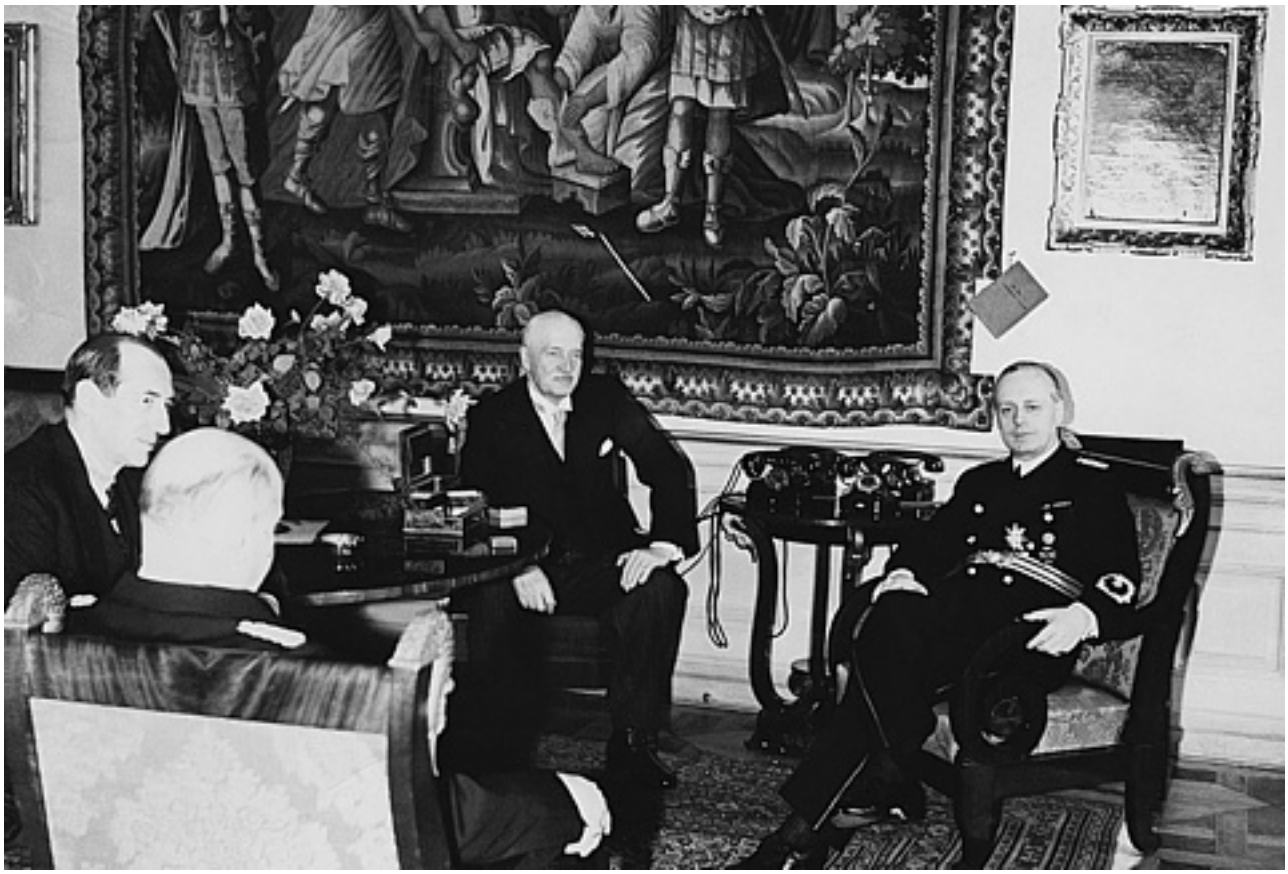
Heinrich Himmler welcomed at Warsaw Central Station. On the right, Reich Ambassador Hans von Moltke, behind him Polish Police Commander General Józef Kordian Zamorski. February 1939.
© National Digital Archives

Himmler and Zamorski. Warsaw, February 1939.
© National Digital Archives

Joseph Goebbels visiting Józef Piłsudski. They are accompanied by Ambassador Hans von Moltke and Józef Beck. Warsaw, June 14, 1934.
© Corbis/FotoChannels

Józef Beck's visit to Adolf Hitler. After this conversation with the leader of the Third Reich, the Polish minister decided to break off relations with Germany. Berchtesgaden, January 5, 1939.
©PAP/DPA

Joachim von Ribbentrop's return visit. Its main purpose was to persuade Poland to join Germany in an expedition against the Soviet Union. Józef Beck welcomes his guest at the train station. Warsaw, January 25, 1939.
© National Digital Archives



Reception in honor of the head of German diplomacy. Józef Beck, Ignacy Mościcki, Joachim von Ribbentrop. Royal Castle in Warsaw, January 1939.

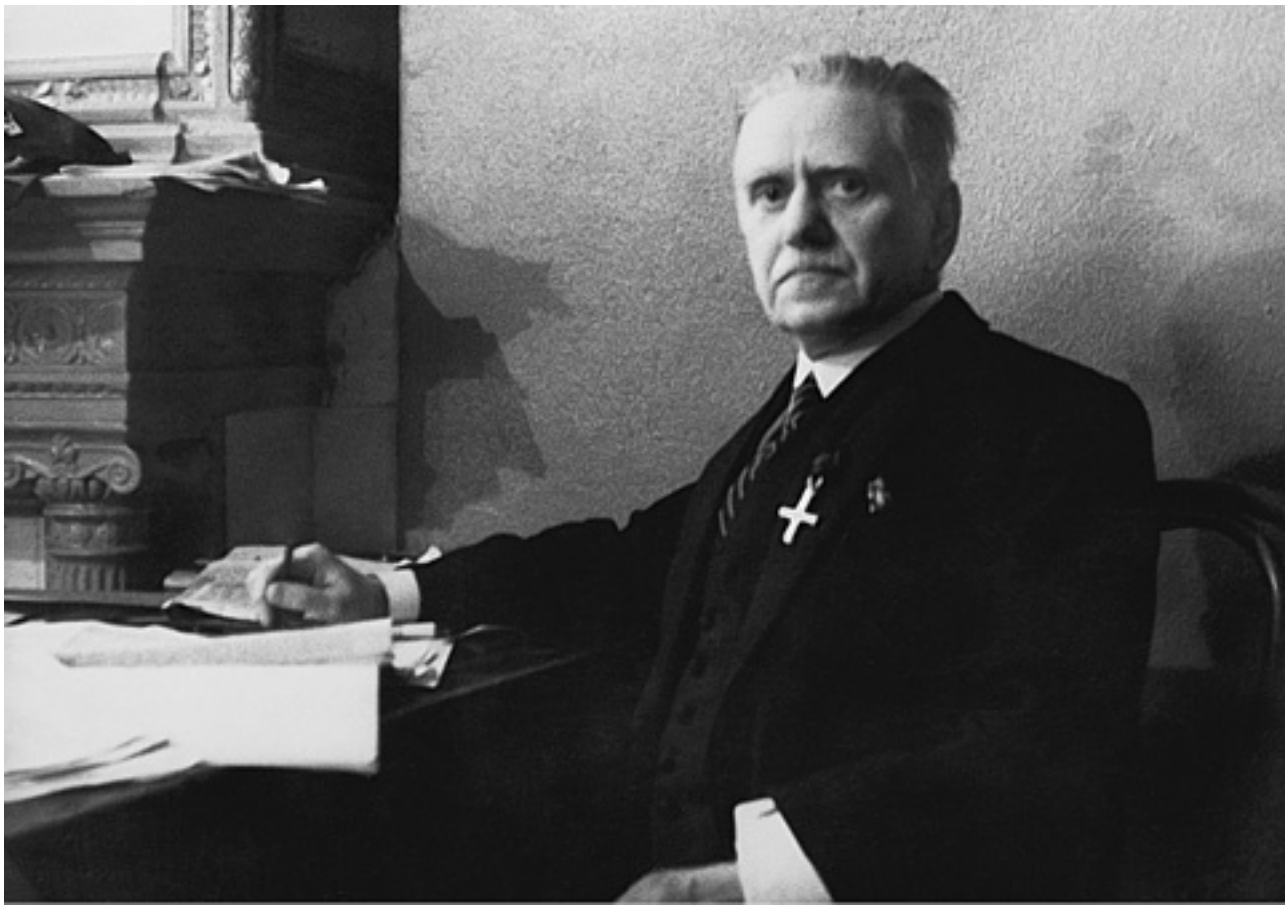
© National Digital Archives

The visit ended in failure. Warsaw evaded giving an answer. Farewell to Joachim von Ribbentrop at the train station. Warsaw, January 27, 1939.

© National Digital Archives

Stanisław Mackiewicz, one of the few Poles who advocated cooperation with Germany.
© National Digital Archives

Adolf Bocheński, author of the brilliant book *Between Germany and Russia*.
Photo from the collection of Kazimierz Ujazdowski



Władysław Studnicki, a leading Polish Germanophile. A man who predicted how World War II would unfold.
© National Digital Archives

Copyright © by Piotr Zychowicz 2012

Copyright © for the Polish e-book edition by REBIS Publishing House Ltd., Poznań 2012 Security

information
In order to protect copyrights against illegal recording, reproduction, and distribution, each copy of this book has been digitally secured. Removing or altering these security measures constitutes a violation of the law.

Editor: Grzegorz Dziamski
Graphic design of the series and cover design: Michał Pawłowski / www.kreskaikropka.pl Cover
photo: © National Digital Archives

Color illustrations in the insert:
from the collection of the Institut für Zeitungsforschung Eigenbetrieb der Stadt Dortmund

First edition e-book
(based on the book edition: *Ribbentrop-Beck Pact*, 1st edition, Poznań 2012) ISBN 978-83-7818-091-3

Dom Wydawniczy REBIS Sp. z o.o. ul.
Żmigrodzka 41/49, 60-171 Poznań
tel. 61-867-47-08, 61-867-81-40; fax 61-867-37-74
e-mail:rebis@rebis.com.pl www.rebis.com.pl

eBook: www.kaladan.pl

W dziejach narodów są chwile, gdy trzeba zacisnąć zęby i iść na bolesne koncesje. Ustąpić, aby ratować państwo przed zniszczeniem, a obywateli przed zagładą. W takiej sytuacji znalazła się Polska w 1939 roku.

Piotr Zychowicz konsekwentnie dowodzi w tej książce, że decyzja o przystąpieniu do wojny z Niemcami w iluzorycznym sojuszu z Wielką Brytanią i Francją była fatalnym błędem, za który zapłaciliśmy straszliwą cenę. Historia mogła się jednak potoczyć inaczej.

Zamiast porywać się z motyką na słońce, twierdzi autor, powinniśmy byli prowadzić Realpolitik. Ustąpić Hitlerowi i zgodzić się na włączenie Gdańska do Rzeszy oraz wytyczenie eksterytorialnej autostrady przez Pomorze. A następnie razem z Niemcami wziąć udział w ataku na Związek Sowiecki. 40 bitnych polskich dywizji na froncie wschodnim przypieczętowałoby los imperium Stalina.

Czy w 1939 roku na Zamku Królewskim w Warszawie należało podpisać pakt Ribbentrop–Beck...?

Zapraszamy na www.paktrb.pl

REBIS
www.rebis.com.pl